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2dartist.
129

Design a battle shaman

Create a cool fantasy character in a Viking themed costume

plus

- Building an impressive portfolio
- **Atmospheric environment concepts**
- Perceptive traditional illustrations
- **Intricate moleskin drawings**
- Speed paint an underwater monster
- **and much more!**

Editor's Letter

ANNIE MOSS
Junior Editor

2dartist is now on Instagram!

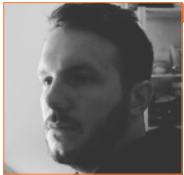## Welcome to *2dartist* issue 129!

Issue 129 is once again packed full of artist insights, inspiration, and brand new gallery artwork! We interview concept artist for AAA games Ned Rogers, and new environment artist Waqas Malik. We also showcase the sketches of Grzesiek Wroblewski, while taking a look at the distinctive portfolio of magazine and book illustrator Nader Sharaf.

In this month's tutorials, Helen Norcott shows how to speed paint an underwater monster, and Katy Grierson demonstrates how you can use Photoshop and photo references to speed paint a seascape. Gina Nelson breaks down how she creates a vibrant character concept, and Markus Lovadina designs a bicycle used to generate power in a futuristic scene. Conor Burke also shows how to create an original fantasy battle shaman character!
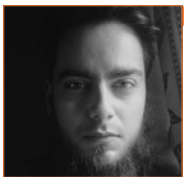
Contributors

NED ROGERS
Ned Rogers is a freelance concept artist from Adelaide, Australia. He works in the AAA videogame and film industries, specializing in environment concepts, key frame and set design.

WAQAS MALIK
Waqas Malik is a freelance concept artist living in Karachi, Pakistan. He has big dreams and is working on making them possible by creating environment concepts primarily for videogames.
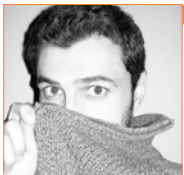
NADER SHARAF
Nader Sharaf is a freelance illustrator currently living in Madrid. His work has been published internationally by a wide range of magazines, book publishers and advertising agencies, among many others clients.

GRZESIEK WROBLEWSKI
Grzesiek Wroblewski is an illustrator, concept artist and designer. He works with companies such as Juice and Platige Image, and for clients including Nike, Ubisoft, Nikon, Burger King, and Cadbury.

HELEN NORCOTT
Helen Norcott is a freelance digital artist and graphic designer based in Middlesbrough, UK. She currently works as a freelance concept artist and specializes in painting vibrant environment art.

MARKUS LOVADINA
Markus Lovadina is a senior concept artist for the entertainment industry with over twenty years experience. He has worked on projects from games and film to publishing, graphic design and commercials.

CONOR BURKE
Conor Burke is an Irish freelance concept artist and illustrator, with a background in architecture. He currently works in London, and has worked with clients in film, architecture and publishing.

KATY GRIERSON
Katy Grierson has been drawing and painting for as long as she can remember, and feels especially privileged that it is her job. She's always had an active imagination and take greats pleasure in world building.

GINA NELSON
Gina Nelson is a self taught 2D artist originally from South Africa. She currently works as the lead artist at the London based games studio, The Secret Police, and specializes in concept art and 2D game art.

JUAN PABLO ROLDÁN
Juan Pablo Roldán is a freelance concept artist based in Medellin, Colombia. He creates deeply atmospheric scenes and environments for film and game projects, including the upcoming *Halo Wars 2*.

Your Magazine.
Get the most out of it!

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Top tips for viewing

For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: **DOWNLOAD**

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2. Go to the **View** menu, then **Page Display**;
3. Select **Two Page Scrolling**, making sure that **Show Cover Page in Two Page View** is also selected.
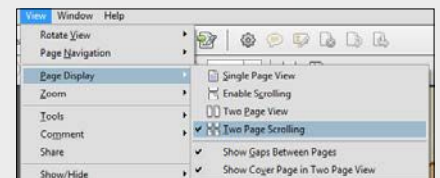
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In the Contents pages, we have direct links to all articles within the magazine. If a certain article catches your eye, simply click (or tap on handheld devices) on the page number within the Contents, and you will be taken straight to that article.

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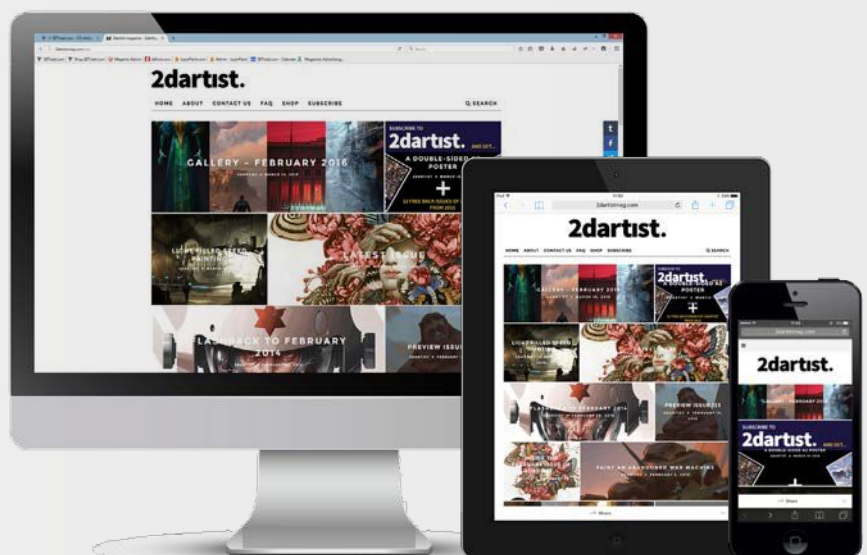
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Contents Issue 129

70

20

100

Building an impressive portfolio

Concept artist for the videogame and film industries, Ned Rogers, discusses how his personal portfolio helped him develop his own style and bolstered his professional work… ▶

The Artist
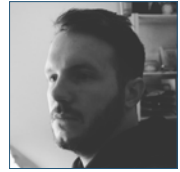
Ned Rogers
nedrogers.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Ned Rogers is a freelance concept artist from Adelaide, Australia. He works in the AAA videogame and film industries, specializing in environment concepts, key frame and set design.

An interior illustration of the White Dragon's lair for *Dungeons & Dragons* © Wizards of the Coast

Having begun his art career studying graphic design and editorial illustration, Ned Rogers has crossed genres and developed an exciting career as a freelance concept artist in the entertainment industry. Working on varied projects across TV, videogames and film, Ned is currently in demand developing TV series pitches for production companies. He also teaches at CDW Studios, Adelaide, where he helps students train and prepare for industry jobs.

This month we speak to Ned about how his commercial work has become more comfortable now that it reflects his own personal style and personality. He also shares his advice for budding artists on building strong foundations in drawing and painting, making contacts in the industry, and giving yourself the freedom to pursue your own ideas…

● *Cooper Racer* **for the** *Cosmos* **personal project © Ned Rogers**

2dartist: Hi Ned, thanks for talking to *2dartist*! Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Ned Rogers: Hi! Thanks for having me. I started out studying graphic design and editorial illustration at university, but it didn't take me long to figure out I wanted to work in the entertainment industry. I managed to transition during the course over a couple of years, and I've had the privilege of working on a lot of interesting and varied projects across TV, games and film.

A lot of my recent work has been developing TV series pitches for production companies here in Australia. Unfortunately I can't really talk about some of the larger projects I've been working on; it's one part of this job that can be a bit annoying! I also teach at CDW Studios here in Adelaide, a specialized school run through Flinders University that focuses on getting students trained properly and into industry jobs.

2da: So far in your career you've worked on games, TV and film projects. How has your work changed and developed over the course of these projects?

NR: Looking back at my early work I can see so many mistakes and weird habits that I hope I've managed to train out of my hand! That's an ongoing battle though.

I think I've also become more comfortable doing commercial work that reflects my own personal style and personality. It's an easy trap when you're just starting out to try and copy all the pretty art you see published instead of bringing your own experiences to the table.

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any other artists you particularly admire?

NR: I have so many sources, too many to fit in here! But I've always loved the Dutch masters, and particularly the landscapes that came out of that era. John Berkey is another favorite, along with a lot of other 1970s sci-fi artists.

On top of that I think travel is an important source of inspiration. You can't imagine how varied the world is until you go and see it for yourself.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

NR: Well, to go back to the last question I'd probably ask any of the Dutch masters, or even John Berkey, how they managed to get so much life into so few brushstrokes. But I know they'd just tell me it was practice!

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any brushes you find yourself using again and again?

NR: I work completely digitally for the most part, save a few pencil scribbles here and there. I do have a small set of Photoshop brushes that I always come back to since it's too easy to overload your collection with hundreds of brushes that are only useful for painting scattered leaves or rocks. Less is more.

2da: Which tools and software do you use? Are there any you would like to learn in the future?

NR: Photoshop is where I spend most of my time, but I've been working on training myself to use more 3D packages in the early stages of my work. It seems to be
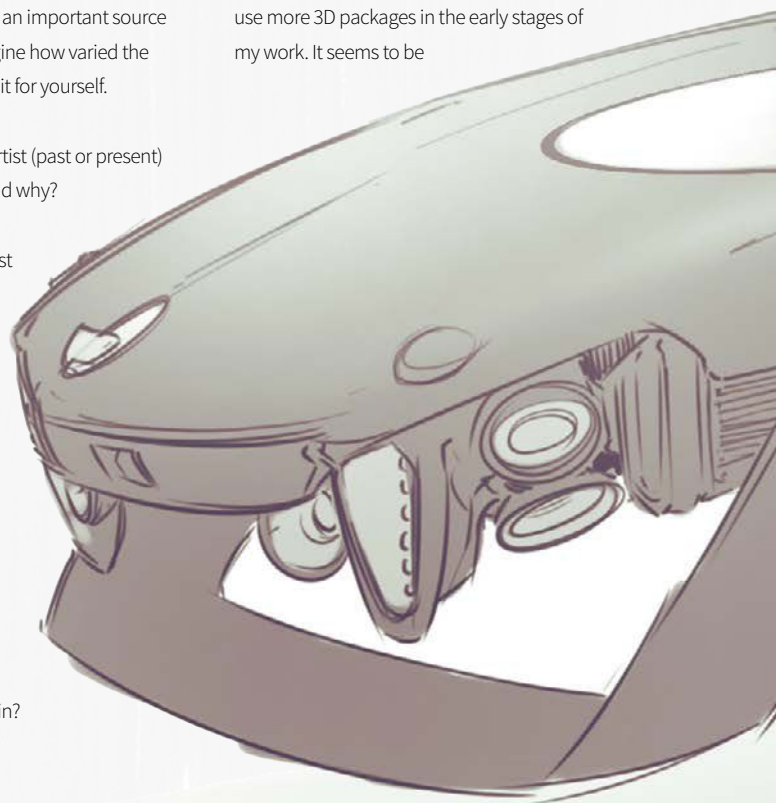
the way the industry is heading, so I feel like I need to stay ahead of that curve. Programs like ZBrush and 3D-Coat make it pretty simple to create very complex compositions and design quickly, but I'd like to spend more time in a program like Maya and learn proper modeling techniques as well.

> **"The designs I create need to be built, either physically or digitally, so they need to work but they also need to help convey a story at the same time"**

2da: How would you describe your job to a group of aliens, who have no idea what a concept artist is or does?

NR: I guess I'm a problem solver in a lot of ways, which is something that was drilled into me at university. The designs I create need to be built,

⚡ PRO TIP

Never stop learning

Even once you land that dream job or big client you need to be of the mindset that you are still a student of art. Bounce ideas off your friends and colleagues, learn new techniques or programs, try sculpting, or do some traditional painting. The internet makes finding new knowledge so easy that you really can just Google a skill you want to learn and come out with a decent basic understanding. If you think that you've learned everything about any aspect of art, it's going to turn around and bite you pretty quick.

either physically or digitally, so they need to work but they also need to help convey a story at the same time. To me those sorts of constraints are the best definition of being creative. Then it's just a matter of knowing a set of tools that allow you to visualize that solution to the people putting it all together.

2da: What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to launch their career as a concept artist?

NR: I think it's about balance. Learn the studio techniques – the software and pipelines – but make sure you have a good foundation in drawing and painting. That will give you the tools you need to produce work of the right quality. But always make sure you allow your own style to creep into everything you do. It might make it a bit harder initially but if you can get work doing something ▶
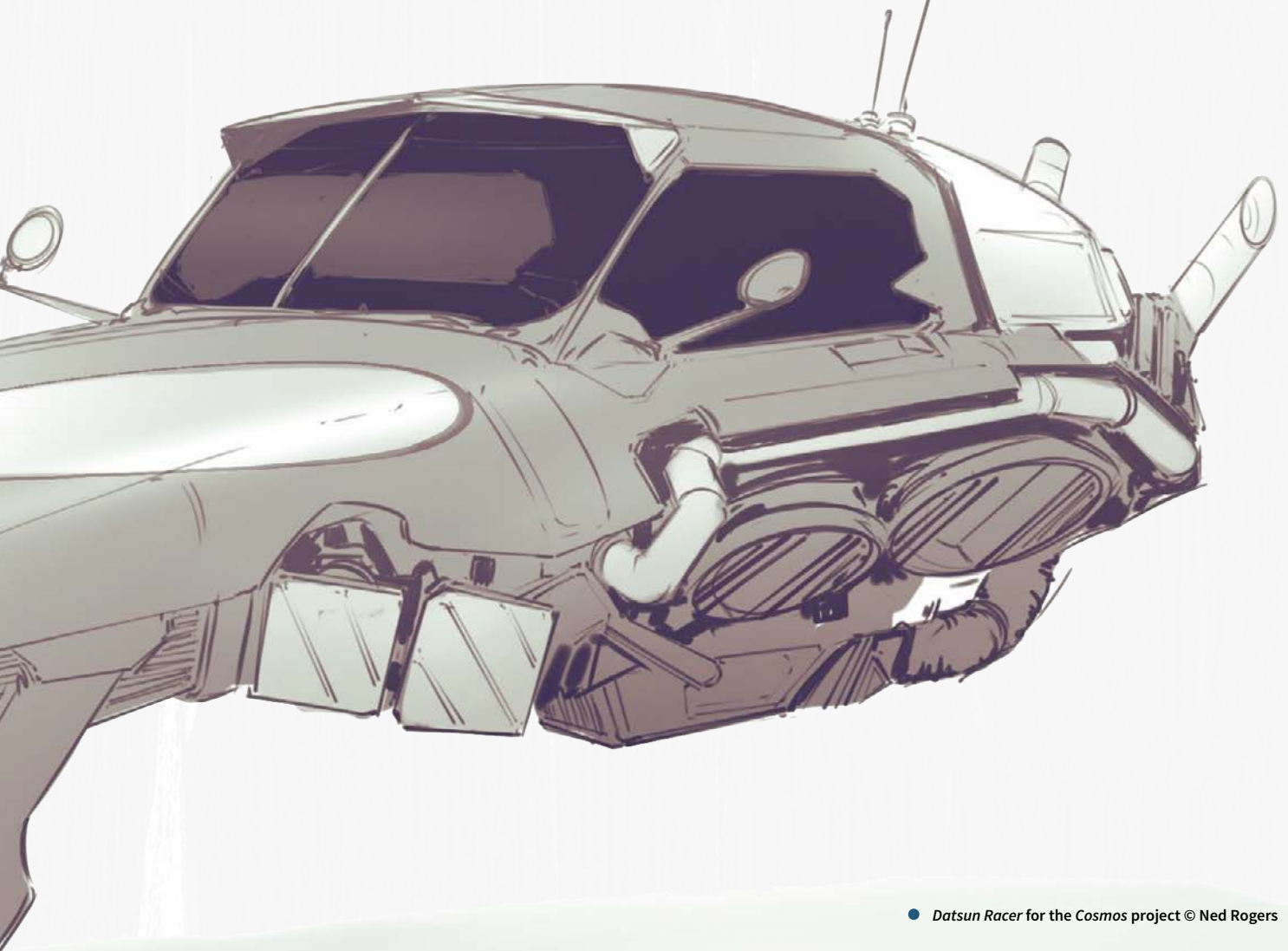
● *Datsun Racer* **for the** *Cosmos* **project © Ned Rogers**

COSMOS

that is uniquely "you" then you instantly become a much more valuable person to have around. Working on personal projects is a great way to cover all the steps of the creative process, and come out the other end with something cool to put in your portfolio. Come up with a little story and design the elements over the course of several images.

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

NR: The storytelling and the people you get to work with. There isn't anything better than trying to tell a cool story with other people who think it's as cool as you do, and who are willing to try out new ideas. That creative back-and-forth as you whittle away at designs and key script moments is the most satisfying process.

2da: Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into and why?

NR: I think I'll always want to work on the production side of the industry but I have a few ideas for projects of my own that would be awesome to get off the ground. That probably means I'll have to teach myself how to direct or produce at some point, but I don't think I'll ever move away from the design aspect of the job.

2da: What do you find most challenging about working as a concept artist?

NR: The business side of the job is probably the hardest bit to get your head around as it doesn't always align with the idea of being an artist. This is especially hard when working freelance and you ▶

Citadel, **a personal work**
© Ned Rogers

Ned's significant artwork

This is a piece I did for a personal project just after I had decided to leave my studio job and work freelance. I'd taken six months off to build a new portfolio aimed squarely at the entertainment industry and I think it was this piece that gained enough traction online to make a few people notice me. Even though I look back at it and see so much stuff I would fix now, I'm still happy with it as a piece that reflects the kind of art I really like to make.

Cocktails and Dream concept for *Project X* © Ned Rogers

Cosmos Wallriders © Ned Rogers

Night Raid, part of the *SENSE* personal project © Ned Rogers

don't have producers and managers to cover you. Timelines can be too short, or budgets don't add up, that kind of thing. But at the end of the day you just have to figure out how to make it all work. Creatively I always find it hard to switch between different projects. Again it's more of a freelance problem, but having to work on jobs that have completely different directions in quick succession can be a bit of a struggle mentally.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

NR: This is where letting your own style into your work can pay off. It lets you relate more to the work and stops it from becoming a slog.

The other thing I try to do is to not work too hard. It might sound weird, or even lazy but you really can't work yourself to the bone all the time and expect to produce good designs at the other end. You need to rest and think. Work to a schedule and give yourself time to get up and go for a walk. I still think my best ideas come to me when I leave the studio and do something else.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

NR: It's always nice to get away from staring at a screen, although I play plenty of games in my spare time. So I'll go out for walks with my girlfriend and the dog, or go and grab lunch at a cafe. Doing personal work is also something I do to relax, without deadlines and all that noise you get from commercial work. I'd like to do some traditional painting too but I haven't found a way to do that without making a mess yet!

2da: And finally, what should we look out for from you in the future?

NR: Hopefully I'll be able to produce some of my own IPs in the future, but at the moment I'm working on some very cool movie pitches for a couple of film studios. It's always hard to tell if a pitch will be successful but I think the directors I am working with are onto something, so stay tuned! ●

Thank you Ned for talking to 2dartist!

⚡ PRO TIP

Save and backup!

Save your work constantly and in different versions. Then make sure you have two back-ups on two different drives. Luckily autosave features are getting better but they still aren't perfect. I've only ever had to go back to my back-ups once, but it was the difference between finishing the job and having to tell the client I couldn't do the work. I know what you're thinking: "It won't happen to me." But it will, and at the worst possible moment.

Mk1 Graveyard for the *Cosmos* project © Ned Rogers

The Artist

Waqas Malik
artstation.com/artist/
waqasmalik

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Waqas Malik is a freelance
concept artist living in
Karachi, Pakistan. He
has big dreams and is
working on making them
possible by creating
environment concepts
primarily for videogames.

Atmospheric environment concepts

Discover the absorbing work of videogame artist Waqas Malik who uses realistic atmospheric
effects and mood lighting to add narrative to environments... ▶
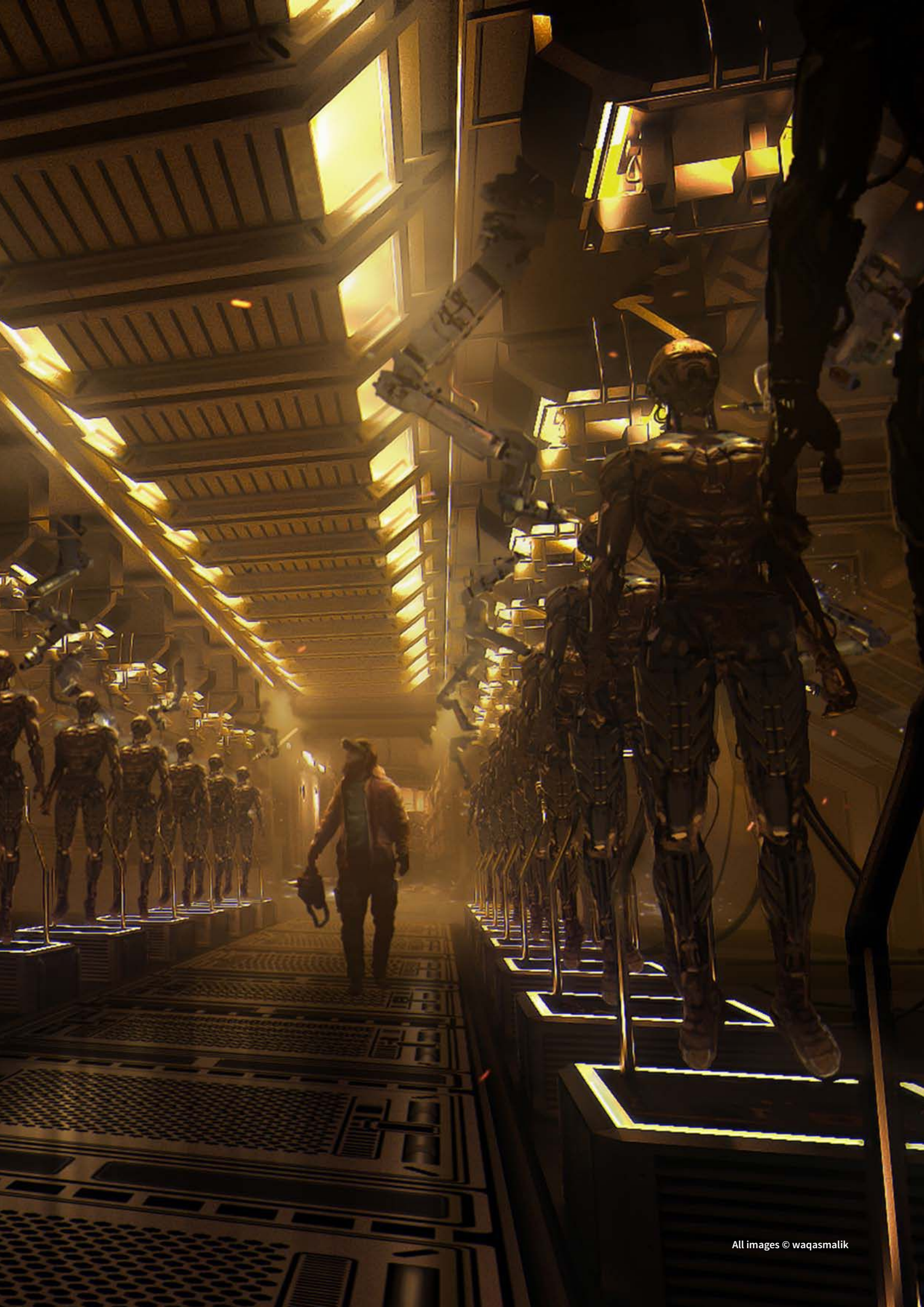
Inspired by the visuals of the *Prince of Persia* **videogame, Waqas Malik desperately wanted to join the videogame industry but had no idea how to do so. It took several years and a few changes of direction, from programming to fine art and then finally learning concept art through online courses, for Waqas to find his way into the industry. Waqas now works as a freelance concept artist creating environment concepts for videogames, and in his free time he works with a friend on their personal project** *STRANGERS***, a realistic CG film.**

Realism greatly inspires Waqas' work, and his artwork often features moody lighting schemes, realistic atmospheric effects, and secluded characters. Here we speak to Waqas about his journey into concept art, how learning 3D has been a difficult but ultimately a very beneficial experience, and he explains where the dark atmosphere of his work comes from…

2dartist: Hi Waqas, thank you for talking to *2dartist*! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

Waqas Malik: I am a concept artist from Pakistan. My focus is on creating environment concepts. Ever since playing *Prince of Persia*, I wished to work on videogames, but I had no idea how to get into the videogame industry, and I did not know what I needed to learn.

Slowly, after spending huge amounts of time researching on the internet, I found some direction. I learned that there are two ways into the videogame industry; either through programming or through art. Of course that understanding was not perfect but nonetheless, it gave me some perspective.

2da: Your work often has quite dark narratives; can you tell us a bit about the ideas behind your work?

WM: Well there are a wide range of things which inspire me, but my biggest inspiration comes from light. The careful use of light can create mood and evoke emotions, and that is what I try to achieve. The reason my work is dark in tone could be because of the geographical influence. In movies and games, rain and clouds are associated with sadness, but where I live we have very hot and sunny weather almost the whole year round, so for us, rain and dark clouds brings joy and happiness. I use overcast and moody lighting conditions in my work a lot due to this.

Spiky mountain
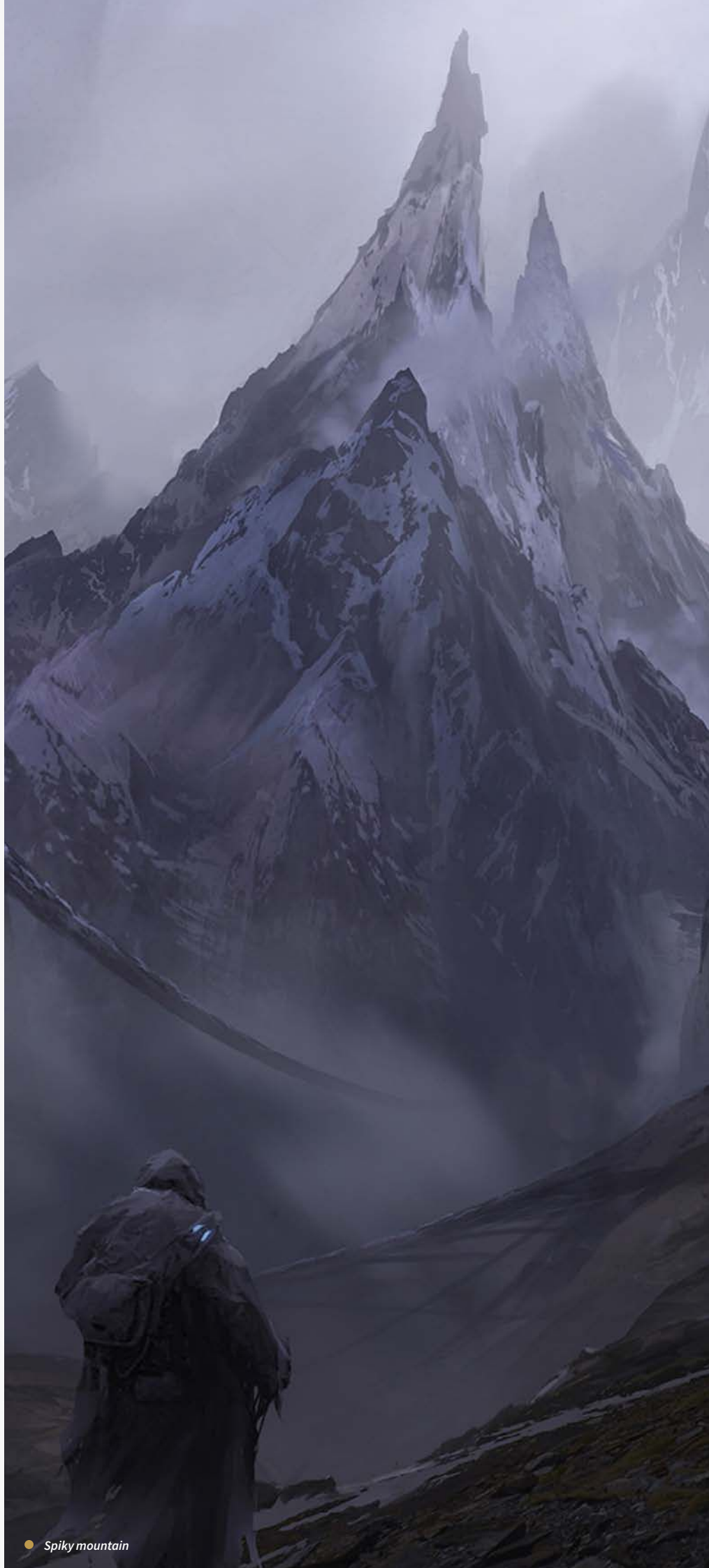
If we look at it from the narrative perspective, then it is also due to the popular trend in movies and games these days. I am developing a personal short animated film project, and some of its concept art paintings are in my portfolio – they have dark narratives, because the story demanded it.

2da: What made you want to pursue a career in the digital art industry?

WM: I have always loved playing computer games, but I played *Prince of Persia* and *Prince of Persia: The Warrior Within*, and got hooked because of the beautiful cinematics and visuals. I would watch the cinematics again and again wondering how they were made; at that time I had no idea how to become a part of this industry. It wasn't until after I graduated from college and spent hours researching it on the internet that I realized that I had always loved creating art and videogames.

I got some direction and applied for a degree in fine art, but fine art was not the solution for me. It revolved mostly around contemporary art and abstract ideas rather than developing the basics of realistic painting like perspective, color, values, composition, and so on. I then stopped studying fine

art and started to learn from online art schools that focused on teaching concept art for videogames.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

WM: I use Photoshop and Blender. Photoshop is my main tool to create artwork but more recently I started using 3D in my work. Learning 3D was not easy for me, and I had always kept away from it as it was very boring to learn 3D in the beginning. However, due to the industry requirements these days, a concept artist must know basic 3D modeling. Now that I have learned it, it has really opened many doors for me to creatively express

myself. It has also boosted my work process in terms of the time it takes me to create an artwork. As for the hardware, I use an old Wacom Intuos3 tablet and an old workstation computer. For the kind of work I do, it is more than enough for me at this point. If I do heavy 3D work in the future then I may need a more powerful machine.

2da: Are there any tools, techniques or software you would like to explore in the future, and why?

WM: I would really love to explore ZBrush and 3D-Coat in the future as these are the best sculpting software, and each has its own powers. I have also done some clay pot making and sculpting ▶

⚡ **PRO TIP**

Using 3D

If you are using 3D for a project, start by taking notes on paper. Draw, design and come up with a composition, and the color and lighting scenario you want to create in the final image. I say this because 3D is a slow process, so figuring out the design before you even start modeling will really give you direction. You can change the lighting and composition in the final image, and you don't necessarily have to stick to the plan completely, but this is the difference between someone who knows what they are doing and someone who is relying on luck.
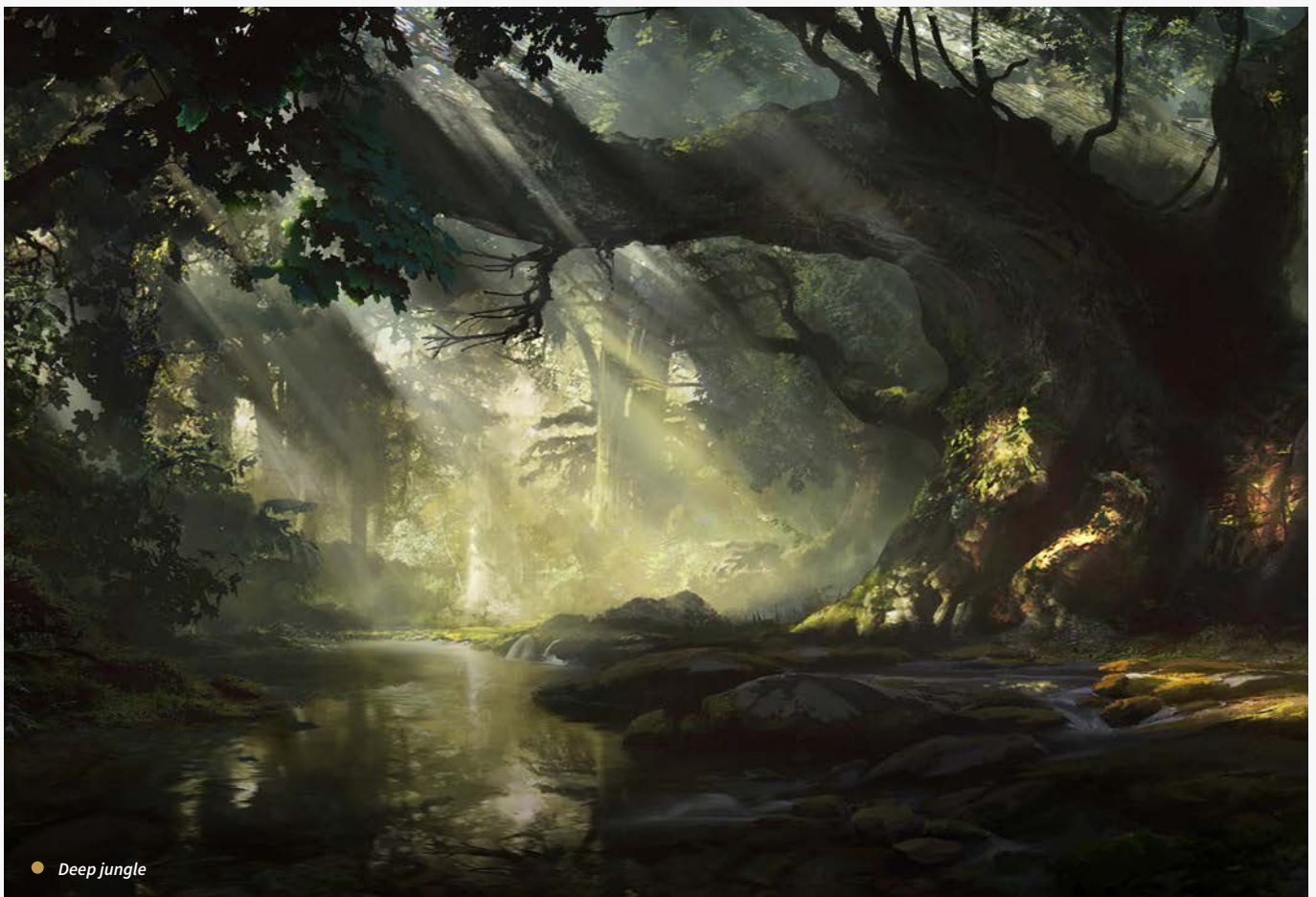
● *Deep jungle*

in traditional mediums, and I really love that, so I want to get into digital sculpting. I think it will give me more creative ways to explore my ideas, and make my process a lot faster too.

When it comes to techniques, I will be getting into matte painting. Although I don't want to be a matte painter, I want to be able to use these techniques in my work. These days matte painting has become very technical and vast and very 3D-based, and I don't particularly like too much technical stuff. I also like to do traditional painting. I have not properly done traditional art before but this

is something I would like to do in the future. I have even purchased some online classes for it, so I will learn as soon as I get some time off from my current personal project.

2da: Which artist or group of artists particularly inspire your work?

WM: In the beginning I was highly inspired by the works of Raphael Lacoste, and he was the art director on *Prince of Persia*. I am still inspired by his work, but now there are also other artists whose work inspires me. These artists are mostly

videogame or movie concept artists and designers. They include Ryan Church, Dylan Cole, Yanick Dusseault, Scott Robertson, Steven Messing, James Paick, John Park and many, many more.

There are also some traditional artists whose work I love such as Renato Muccillio, Joseph Zbukvic, Richard Schmid, and Richard Robinson. They are all realistic painters as I love realism, and this is something which is quite visible in my portfolio.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

WM: That artist would be Joseph Zbukvic; I would love to learn from him. The way he paints with watercolor is amazing. He can create the feeling of realism and mood with just a few simple brushstrokes which is really amazing. Seeing past the visual noise to extract the essence of the subject and then use it in painting amazes me.

2da: Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

WM: That's a difficult question. There is no specific time and place where I feel more creative. But living in the city drains my creativity, so to refresh that I take time off and go to the mountains and get closer to nature.

2da: Artist block is a problem for many creative people. Can you share a couple of tips you use when the inspiration stops flowing?

WM: When I get artist block, the harder I try to break it the worse it gets sometimes. I think the best thing to do is to stop making art and take ▶

some time off to do something else. You don't have to draw 24/7 to get better, but observing the world and traveling is a part of becoming better.

Also, when I don't feel inspired to create any art, I look at other people's artwork. Usually by looking at others' art, I get the boost and new ideas I need to create new artwork.

2da: What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

WM: I have been enjoying working on my own personal project and the creative freedom I have with this. I get to develop the story and design, everything. I really like being free to create my own design and concept.

The project is a realistic CG short film that my friend and I have been working on; currently we are in the pre-production phase. It started with an inspiration, and then we experimented with a couple of story ideas and where we could take it. The project is still not finished but at this stage ▶

🕐 Artist Timeline
Waqas' career so far

2008: Decided to work in the videogame industry but did not know how to start

2009: Started studying programming to be in the videogame industry

2009: Decided to leave programming and began learning art because he always loved drawing

2010: Enrolled for a fine art degree program

2011: Wanted to learn concept art, so Waqas left the fine art program

2012: Started learning concept art from online courses

2014: Got his first small freelance job as a concept artist

2015: Started working freelance for West Studio

2016: Started to focus completely and totally on his CG project

2016: Started using Patreon as a full time independent artist

we have the basic setup, so we can design and produce the concept of locations, props, and characters. It's really fun, just like being a kid again.

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project? Do you dive straight in or do you have a more analytical process?

WM: When I work for a client, my work process is very different from working for myself. For the client work, I start first with trying to understand what the client is asking and what I can provide in broader terms. I then do a lot of research and reference gathering. After that I come up with designs by sketching in my sketchbook, and I come up with interesting compositions which convey the idea perfectly. Then I start to paint and show my client variations of the composition and design, and once things are approved, I then go ahead and complete that artwork. It is a struggle at times to create the image which the client likes. Sometimes what I like, the client may not, so when working with clients I try to give them what they like and make it look as cool as possible.

2da: How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

WM: That is a struggle at times. Sometimes I may accept a project and then later I may

not feel motivated about it, but I tell myself to give the project proper attention and effort. If it is a client's project then I have to do it no matter what and give it the best I can.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

WM: When I am not working, I like to hang out with my friends and go to the beach with them or go to have tea with them. I really like to travel and get out of the city too. I love to be surrounded by nature and greenery. When I am not working, I also do other things like learning art, watching documentaries, and things like that.

2da: Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

WM: I post my work on my website, on ArtStation and many other places such as my Facebook page. As I mentioned previously, I am working on a personal project called *STRANGERS*, and I will be revealing behind the scenes stuff first to my patrons on Patreon. I also share insights into my work process there, and offer critiques to those who want to get better as artists. ●

Thank you Waqas for talking to 2dartist!

Waterfall

Waqas's significant artwork

This is an artwork I made not so long ago but it is a significant one for me because I was learning 3D at the time. I was able to merge 2D and 3D work processes much better than in any of my previous attempts.

Also this is a significant work as it is the concept of my project *STRANGERS*. It tells the story very clearly and it evokes a strong feeling.

The Artist

Nader Sharaf
nadersharaf.com

Nader Sharaf is a freelance
illustrator currently
living in Madrid. His work
has been published
internationally by a wide
range of magazines, book
publishers and advertising
agencies, among many
others clients.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Perceptive traditional illustrations

Multimedia illustrator Nader Sharaf showcases his fascinatingly
intuitive artworks ▶

Disappointed with the lack of drawing opportunities that a career in advertising provided, Nader Sharaf switched directions to pursue a career in graphic design. After many happy years, his passion for illustrating ideas and texts led him to study illustration before becoming a freelance illustrator. Now with over a decade's experience creating work for magazines, publishing houses and art galleries, Nader's clients include Penguin Random House, Warner Bros. and ABC.

Nader's captivating work often combines a simple style with elaborate ideas, exploring the complexities of both nature and people. This month Nader speaks to *2dartist* about his highly intuitive work, discovering new creative possibilities and his life as a freelance illustrator…

2dartist: Hello Nader! Thanks for talking to *2dartist*. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Nader Sharaf: My path began with me as an artist in the strict sense of the word rather than an illustrator. My first big opportunity was given to me by an art gallery that I still work with.
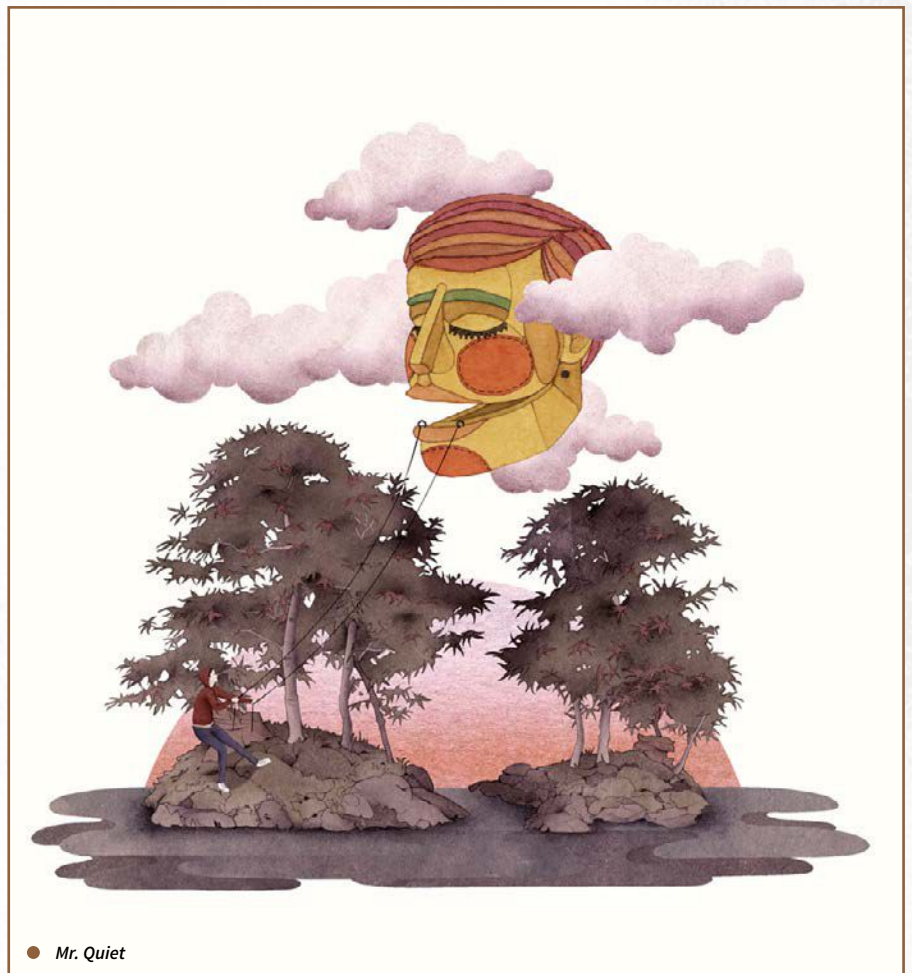
● *Mr. Quiet*

● *Moderate love for nature VI*
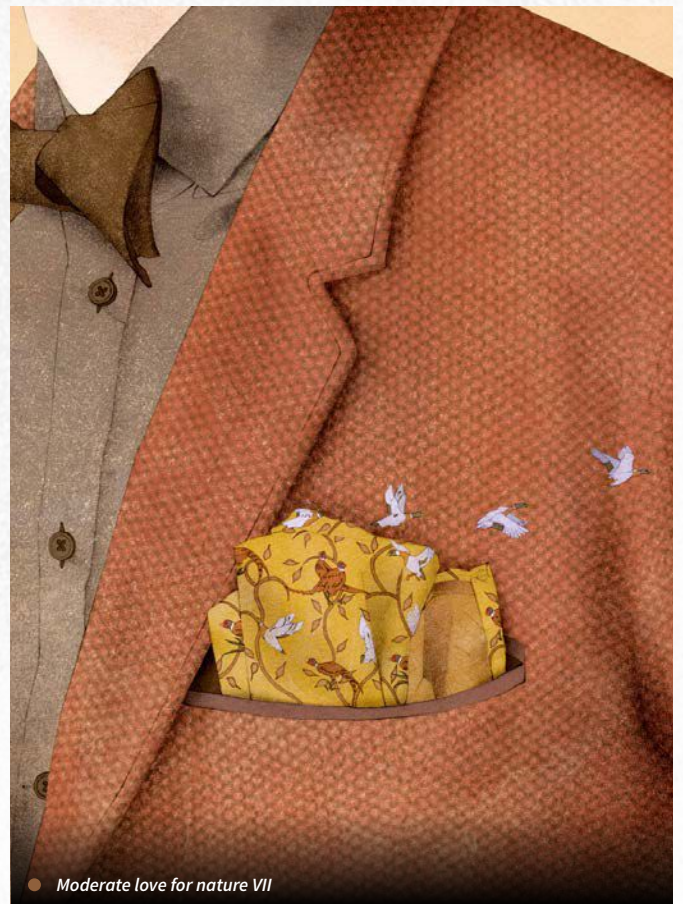
● *Moderate love for nature VII*

At that time my portfolio mostly consisted of personal projects. After that, I received my first commissions, mainly for poetry and literature publications. I truly believe that was the key for me to develop my own language and universe beyond the simple graphic representation of text.

From then until now, I have worked on illustrations for posters to book covers, and also on various commissions for advertising agencies. Recently, I've been having the strong feeling that a cycle in my career is about to close. I don't know exactly what's next, but I'm eager to discover it.

2da: What or who encouraged you to take up a career as a freelance artist?

NS: Apart from some good friends who knew my passion for drawing, nobody really encouraged me to become an illustrator. In fact, it was quite the contrary. From an early age I knew deeply that I wanted to get involved in something that would allow me to communicate with the world, maybe because I was insanely shy. It took me a few years to find out what kind of language would match my personality. At the age of twelve I took my first drawing class and I realized, without any doubt, that drawing was going to be my language for life.

2da: Your work has a really strong sense of narrative but always seems to retain an imaginative, abstract style. How do you go about formulating your ideas?

NS: I usually face every artwork as if it is a puzzle composed by, paradoxically, two pieces: what I want to tell (the idea) and the way I want to tell it. For me, the idea is the cornerstone, and what's more, I always seek that extra piece of information that turns any illustration into something narrative. I don't want just a "logo," but I take care the final image isn't redundant or excessive in terms of the information it provides.

The other piece of the puzzle, the way I want to tell that idea, is a more complex process in which my experiences, my intuition and my own thoughts play a key role. The method should also fit within the specific requirements of the commission.

2da: Where do you turn for inspiration? Are there any artists you like to reference?

NS: Nature and its intelligence are a huge source of inspiration for me, as well as people's inner life. I encounter inspiration very randomly,

sometimes just going out for a long walk. That's why I usually mix them in my work trying to create a connection, or a strong interaction, that plays to a deeper level.

As years go by, I realize what an eclectic person I am. I deeply admire many artists from many disciplines, from illustration to cinema, through literature or music. I also tend to be driven by specific works of art rather than the artists they were created by.

2da: What advice can you give to our readers who want to develop their illustration techniques in a similar manner?

NS: Do not ever draw just to boast of having a good technique. Even more, do not ever set any work aside because of the technique. There are thousands of technically excellent artists around the world and be sure that as an illustrator you will spend your whole life improving your manual skills, so please don't worry about that.

You are better off developing your very own universe, your own unique way of contemplating life and telling stories, without fear or restrictions. Create just because you ▶

● *Magic mountain* **illustration for Sugartremens magazine**

Band on the river

feel it, not because there's a fashionable way of drawing and painting. Keep the commitment to yourself first and everybody will appreciate it. Like the familiar quote says: "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken."

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

NS: I enjoy mixing techniques such as watercolor, colored pencils, acrylics, inks or graphite, and also making them up on the computer. Because every technique has very peculiar qualities in terms of trace, brightness or texture it is very easy to homogenize and balance all of them with Photoshop; to me it is the best tool for this task without a doubt. Also, one has to take into account the requirements of each commission in regards to nuances, brightness or saturation, so it's important to me to find out what technique fits each work best.

2da: Do you have a particular place you like to go to draw? Do you create your works in a studio, at home or out in nature?

NS: I always work at home, which at this point is already a kind of studio. My next step is to move to a real studio where I won't to be worried about staining the floor or the furniture. I'm not used to drawing outdoors because the times when I'm not at home are precisely when I'm taking inspiration. My mind registers quite well what catches my attention or the ideas flowing in my head, so home is the headquarters where ▶

⚡ NADER'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

This is one of my earliest artworks. It might be officially my first illustration or, at least, an image that represents the moment when years ago I finally considered myself an illustrator. The piece called *A Farewell to Problems* depicts a young boy on top of his problems, which are represented by a huge bear. He's being watched by his relatives and close friends and seems to be ready for walking unafraid from that moment on.

It was my first completely narrative image, not just one of those drawings I kept doing in my sketchbook. Compared to my recent work, this piece may seems quite simple and not very finished, but I love how fresh and pure, how spontaneous, it still looks. I love the way it already contained my will of becoming an illustrator.

● *A Farewell to Problems*
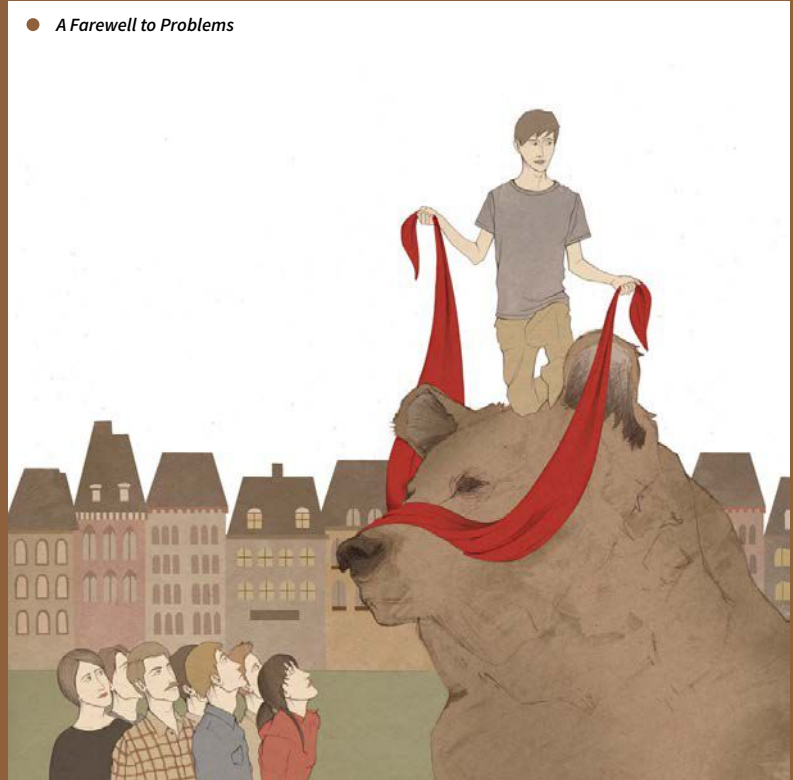
Madrid skyline ●

I start shaping what I have collected out there in the form of images, feelings or emotions.

2da: What has been your favorite project to work on so far?

NS: I greatly enjoy illustrating short tales for literary magazines. Very often, they are fresh and witty stories written by talented young authors. I have also enjoyed illustrating the covers of novels a lot, since the challenge is double: to sum up a story of 200 pages in only one image, and to make it appealing enough to catch the customer's attention. In addition, I believe there's something of permanence about the nature of a book cover. I consider it as the book's face, silent on a shelf, being watched by the reader and by different generations of the same family.

2da: How do you deal with a challenging project? Do you have any tips for our readers?

NS: Every artist works in a very personal way when it comes to facing a project. I can only say that to me it's important to visualize perfectly what I'm going to do. Otherwise, I'll be lost in the middle of the realization, crying because I have no clear idea of where I want to arrive.

At the beginning of my career I would never make use of sketches before initiating a project, but for some time now I have used sketches because they make the task much easier in terms of composition. In my opinion early sketches are one of the master keys of a successful artwork.

2da: Are there any other skills and techniques you would like to learn in the future? Are there any materials you would like to experiment with?

NS: I once worked with linocut and absolutely fell in love. Many illustrators, including myself, try to obtain that peculiar rough and worn out linoleum texture by using digital tools. But when you get it by carving the material yourself, the satisfaction and finish are much different.

Lately I feel very attracted to collage and the amazing narrative effects you can get just by juxtaposing pieces of pictures. I would like to explore this technique and include it in my work process when necessary.

2da: What has your experience as a freelance illustrator been like? What lessons have you learned?

NS: Honestly, it's never been too easy. You have to accept very soon the idea that you'll be a kind of a one-man band, your own trademark. Sometimes that is exhausting while other times it is exciting. Since I started as a freelance illustrator I've been offered incredible jobs that

I had never dreamed of. I've had commissions that have allowed me to gain self-confidence and to know what my limitations are.

It takes time to feel totally comfortable with your abilities, but you keep improving every single day just because you love your profession. In spite of the difficulties, I've never felt as happy and fulfilled in my whole life as I do now.

2da: How would you explain your work to a group of aliens?

NS: I would say that very often we human beings have feelings and emotions impossible for us to express accurately to our interlocutors. But beyond our restrictive language, I truly believe we all have a special sense of perception that connects us in a deeper way. With my work I try to play on that level of subtle human interaction and behavior; it's a space where you only need to feel. I am quite sure an alien is able to sense that too.

2da: What does a working day in the life of Nader look like?

NS: I wake up early in the morning and love having breakfast away from home while reading newspapers, magazines or simply watching the people go by, which is one of my favorite hobbies. I'm more productive from noon until late night. Consequently, my workday starts when all the daily errands have been done and, therefore, my time to create is entirely mine. Even if I'm not working on a project, I sit at my desk everyday trying to shape different ideas or future projects I'm immersed in. At the end of the day, one of the things I like the most is walking around the city in order to get some air and to speak to myself.

2da: How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art? ▶

● **Cover illustration for**
The Rate of Clockwise
published by Penguin
Random House

NS: Traveling to me is like discovering the infinite rooms of a gorgeous house called Planet Earth. It is like putting yourself inside different sceneries with new stimulations. What really travels is your mind. I would say that after drawing, traveling is what I love the most.

Lately, taking care of plants is becoming my new "innocent pleasure." Having so many and such different species at home and see them growing, makes me realize how varied and fascinating nature is. I'm almost creating a domestic jungle. I also love cinema and going out for very long and inspiring walks.

2da: And finally, what can we look forward to from you next?

NS: I don't even know… The truth is at the present moment, all my worries revolve around what will be my next step and where do I sincerely want to go. I would like to capture what I've learned during all these years in an illustrated book, a sort of compilation of my artistic and human curiosities, but I still haven't come up with the story I want to tell. I'm also keen on working on more projects as amazing as the ones I've worked on until now, and to keep learning a little bit more with each.

Thank you Nader for taking the time to speak to *2dartist* today! ●

● *Moderate love for nature I*

● *From your door to mine (The Kiss)*
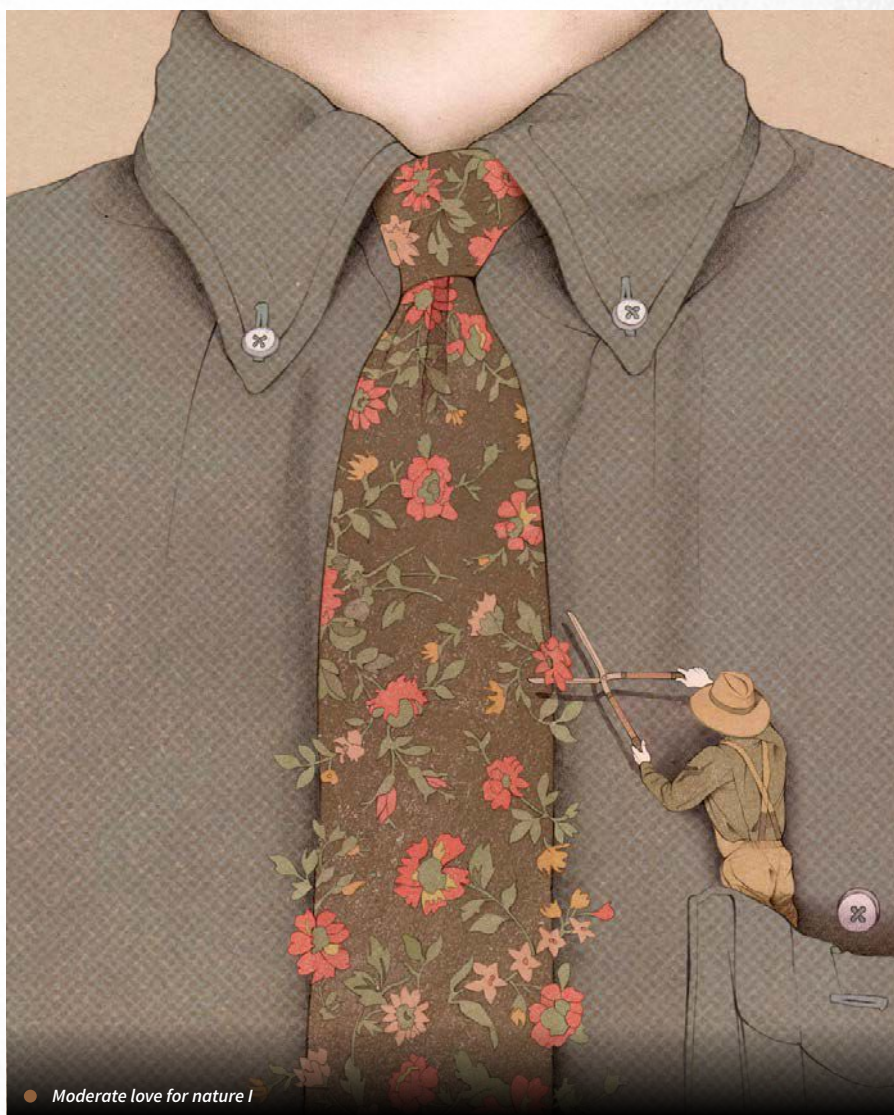
GRZESIEK WROBLEWSKI

Sketchbook

Illustrator and concept artist Grzesiek Wroblewski lets us peek inside his moleskin sketchbook at his detailed, labyrinthine drawings

The Artist

Grzesiek Wroblewski

gwroblewski.com

Grzesiek Wroblewski is an illustrator, concept artist and designer. He works with companies such as Juice and Platige Image, and for clients including Nike, Ubisoft, Nikon, Burger King, and Cadbury.

WARNING NUDITY

Discover the artistic influences behind Grzesiek's complex works...

I don't remember how I started drawing; I guess it was always a part of my life. It was just me, a pencil and some paper. My mum particularly encouraged me, she always supported me and she was the person who gave me my first sketchbook. Sketchbooks are really convenient things so I always have one on me. You never know when you are going to have an idea for a new illustration.

I guess I never deliberately pursued a career as an artist; it was more a case of following my intuition. The highlights of my career so far have been working with big name companies. I've had the pleasure to work with Oscar nominated Tomek Baginski illustrating *The Witcher* covers, and I've also been chosen to exhibit my works as a part of the European Capital of Culture in Wrocław 2016. I can say that my dreams have come true, but I am ready for more.

I've never felt like I need any motivation to work as drawing is always a pleasure. Hand drawing gives me more control on a form. To be honest, most of my illustrations have their beginning in a sketchbook.

Inspiration and ideas

Most of my inspirations come from life and nature, but also from books and movies. A lot of my ideas come to me in coffee shops. I know it sounds funny but I love to draw in public spaces, and sometimes I just can't focus when it is too quiet. I'm inspired by artists such as Pat Perry, Dave Rapoza, Jason Shawn Alexander, Aaron Horkey, James Jean and many more. Unfortunately I don't spend much time in galleries. I try to go to as many exhibitions as I can but it is never enough.

I have a supportive network of fellow artists and it is amazing how creative people can help each other these days. I have friends all over the world that inspire and support me.

I don't worry about whether my ideas are good or not. I just draw what I feel and hope it will be good… well, of course the knowledge of composition and perspective helps a bit. When I have a really good idea I just draw, no matter if it is the middle of the night, or if I am outside and it is raining; when I feel an idea might be good I am drawing. ▶

> "I love to draw in moleskin sketchbooks with red pencil and ink. There is something special in those yellow pages, and good quality paper helps with details"

● *Dragon*

● *Love him to pieces*

● *In too deep* **a drawing for Inktober 2015**

● *Space pirates*

This isn't wonderland and you're not Alice ●

Materials

I love to draw in moleskin sketchbooks with red pencil and ink. There is something special in those yellow pages, and good quality paper helps with details. My favorite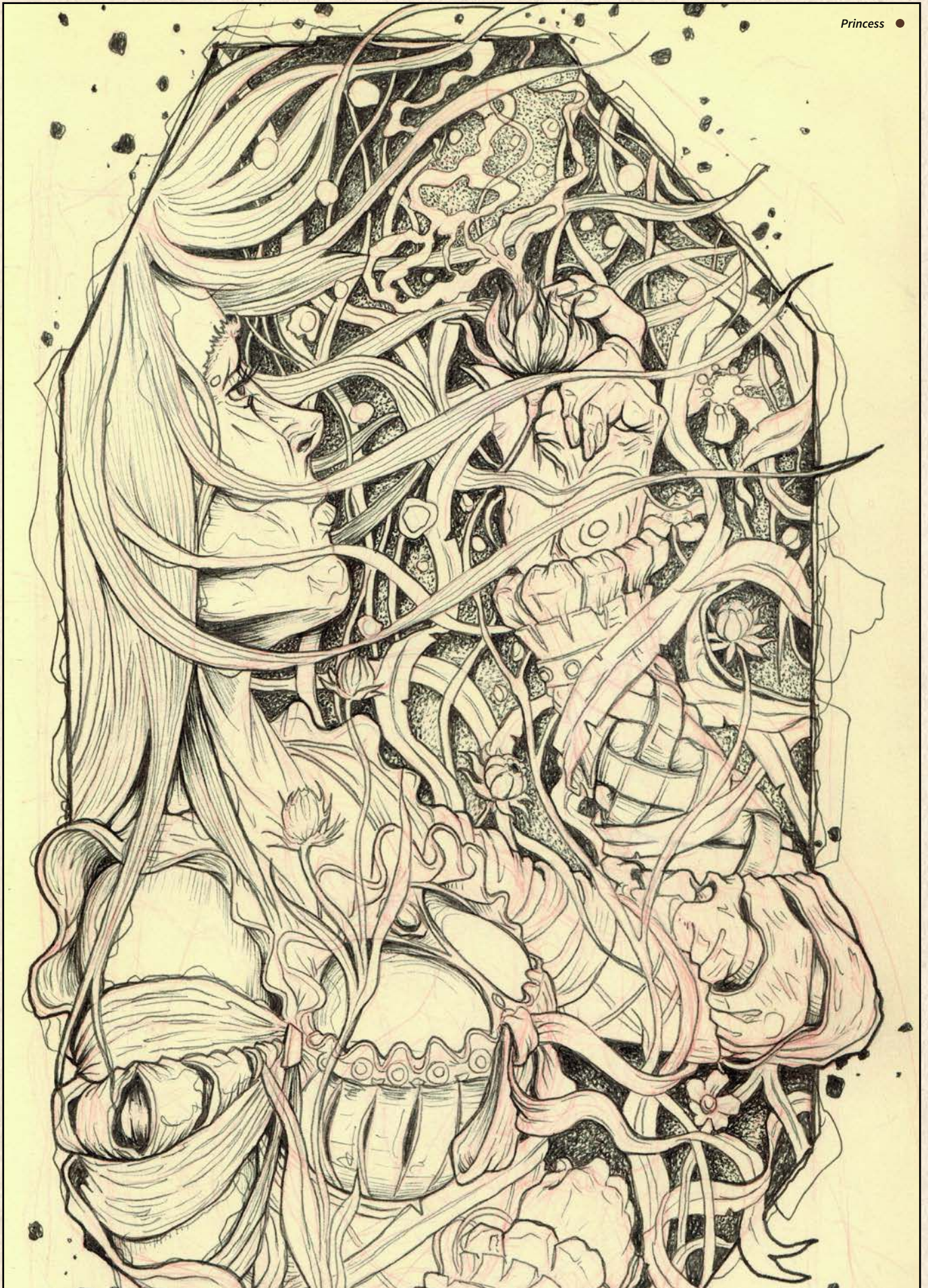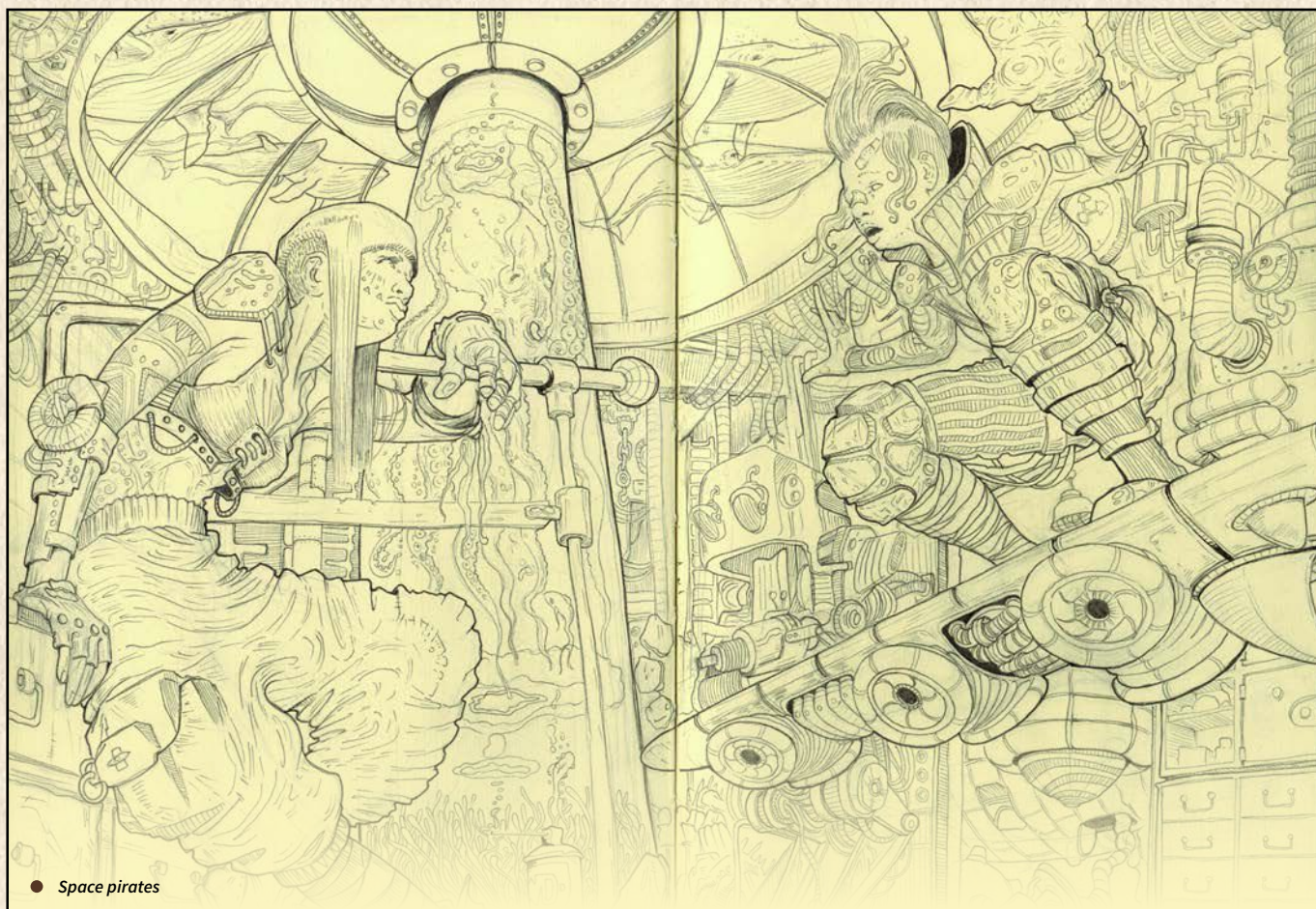 materials are moleskins, the Jotter Parker pen, and Copic Multiliner SP pens. When it comes to sketchbooks, I haven't found any other that would replace the moleskin for me.

I guess I am obsessed with paper and inks; the way they interact with each other. Of course there are just some materials I like more than others, and there are some that I don't know how to use to express myself. I must say I love my routine, though I never say no to trying new techniques and materials. I would like to work more with 3D software and after that try sculpting.

> "Sometimes the most challenging aspects of sketching appear when you are working for a client, but you just have to forget about them and do what you are best at"

Sketching techniques

I specialize in line art. I have this theory that everyone sees the world in different ways and I see it in lines and shapes. The only sketching tip I have is to work hard and study perspective, anatomy and composition. Sometimes the most challenging aspects of sketching appear when you are working for a client, but you just have to forget about them and do what you are best at. I try to take pleasure from what I do and have fun with different mediums.

I was given the advice that "everyone has their own, find yours and work on it." It is always better to know the mistakes of others than learning on your own though. It is important to learn anatomy, study architecture and observe nature in botanical gardens. ●

Sinister

PYK

● *Lepidoptera*

● *Lepidoptera*

Lu Ball

Waking life
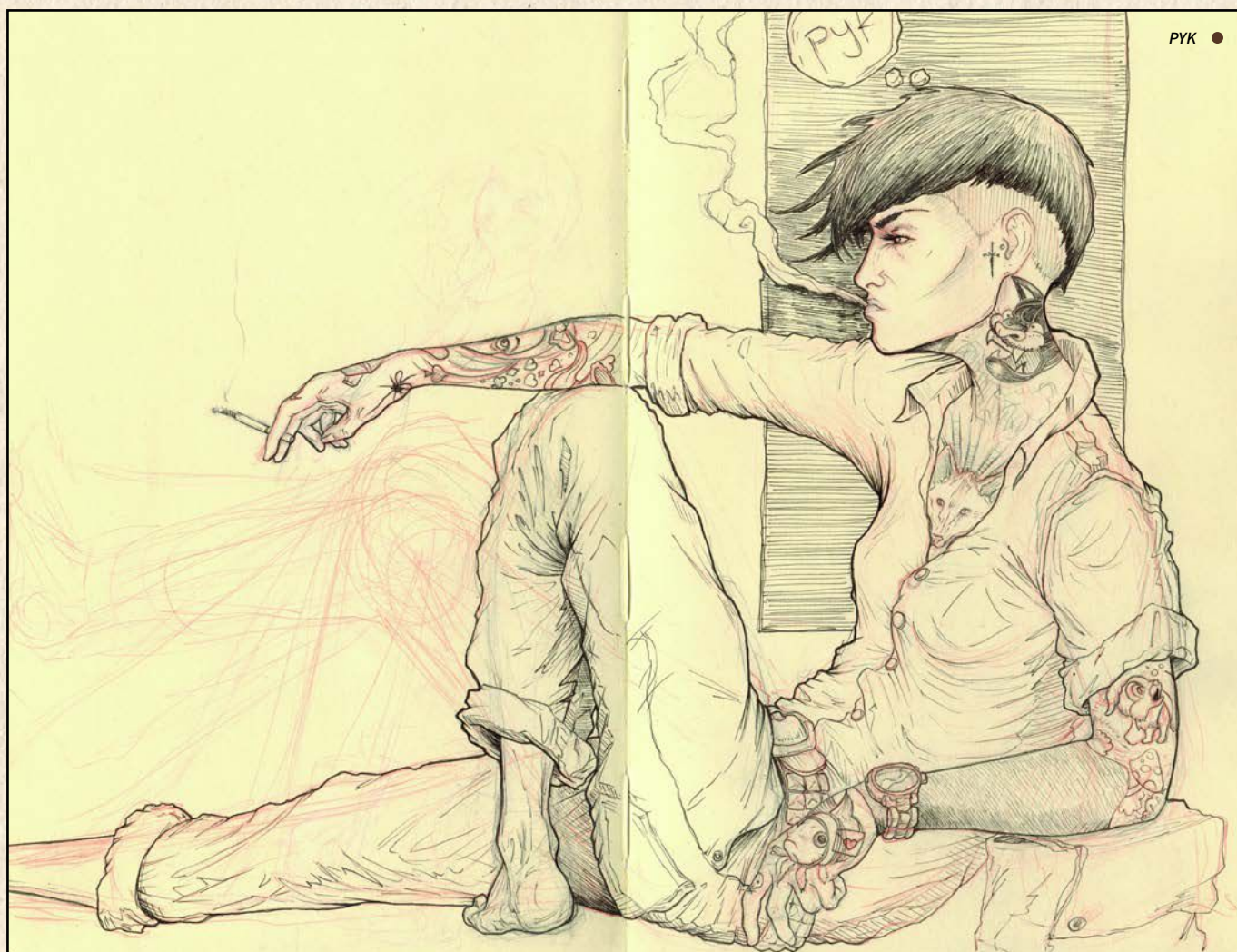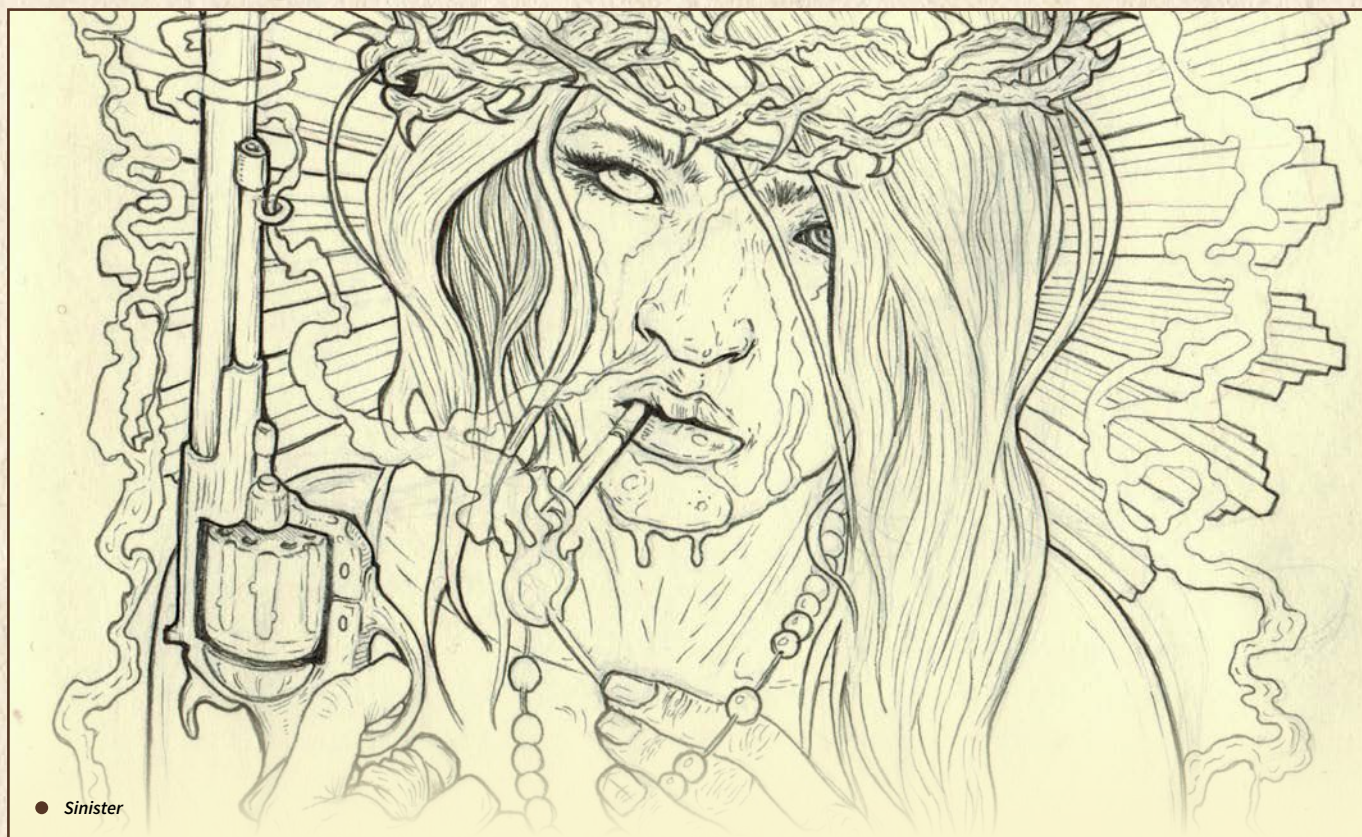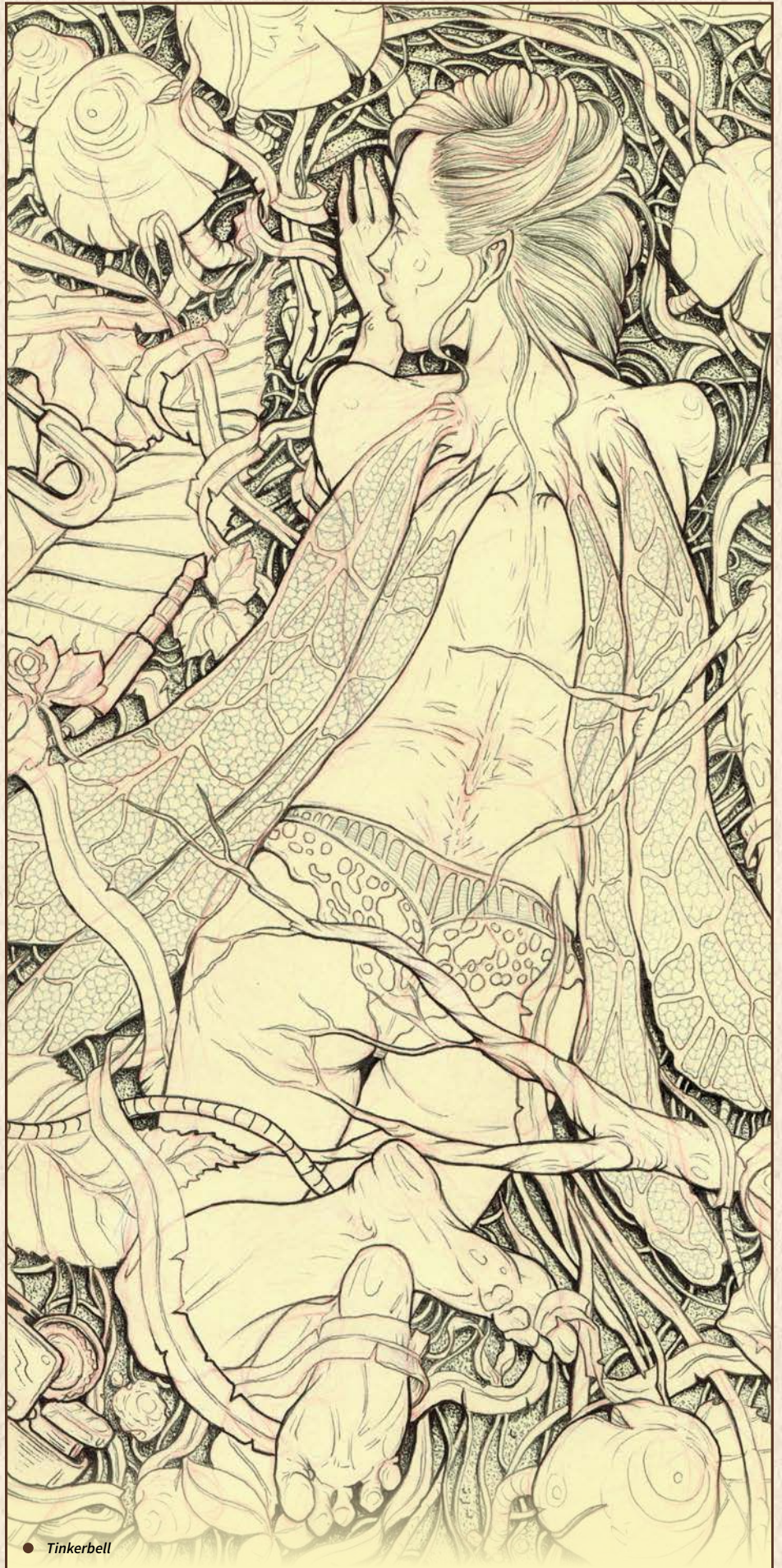
Tinkerbell

2dartist

Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

To submit, simply email Annie at **annie@3dtotal.com** with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Art **Gallery**

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!

Bay, sunrise
Sergey Grechanyuk
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/grekgss
© Sergey Grechanyuk
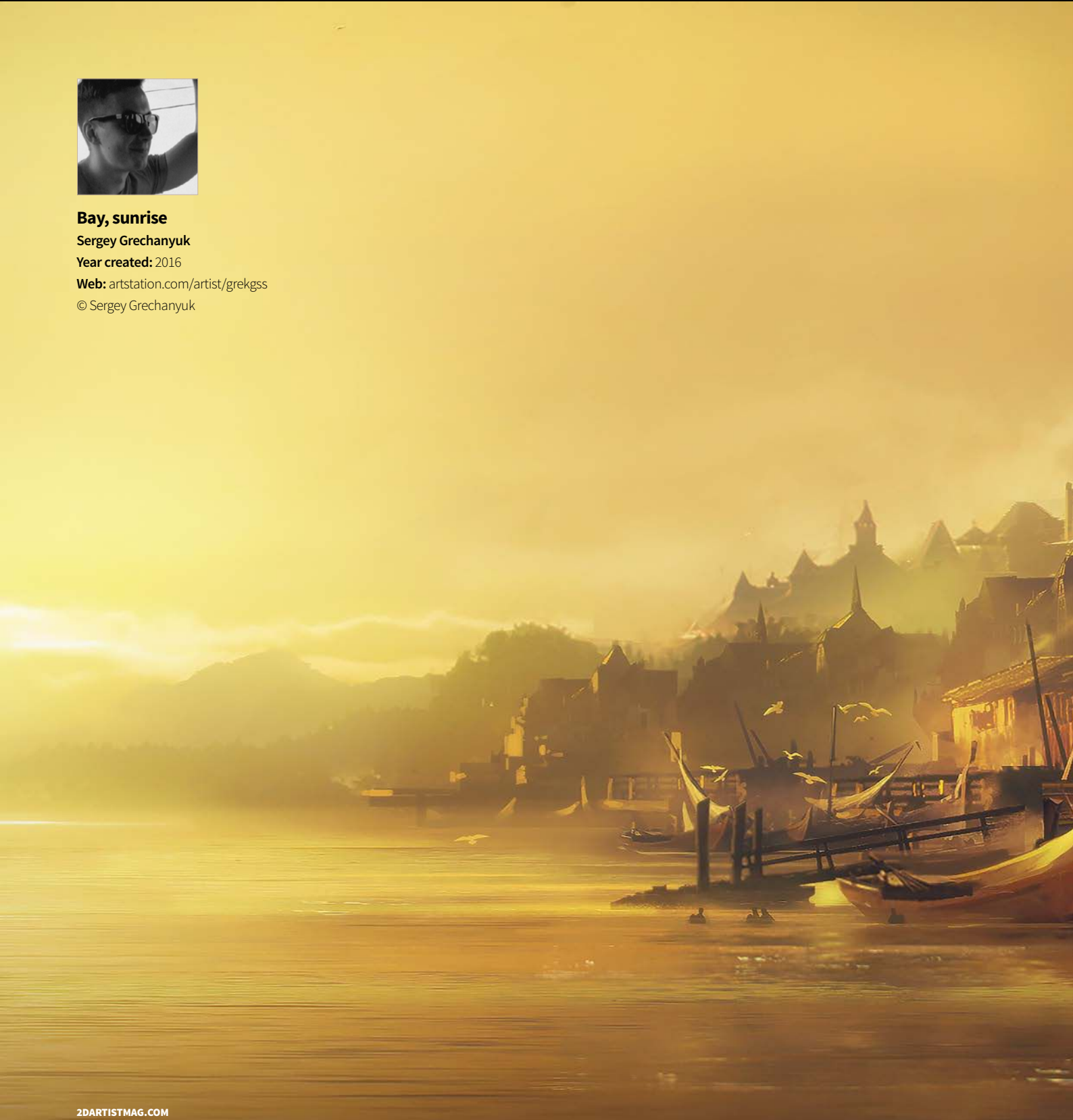
Submit your images! Simply email **annie@3dtotal.com**
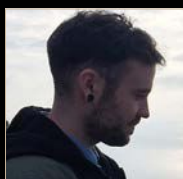
The Ship
Romain Jouandeau
Year created: 2016
Web: romain-jouandeau.com
© Jouandeau

Viking Castle
Martin Deschambault
Year created: 2016
Web: dechambo.com
© Martin Deschambault
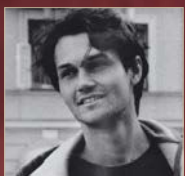
Steampunk town, Red Dragon
Vladimir Manyukhin /Mvn78
Year created: 2016
Web: mvn78.artstation.com
© Vladimir Manyukhin

Drowning City
Robby Johnson
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/rjohnson
© Robby Johnson

Year created: 2016

Web: anfedart.artstation.com
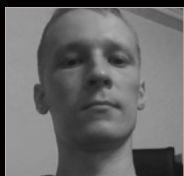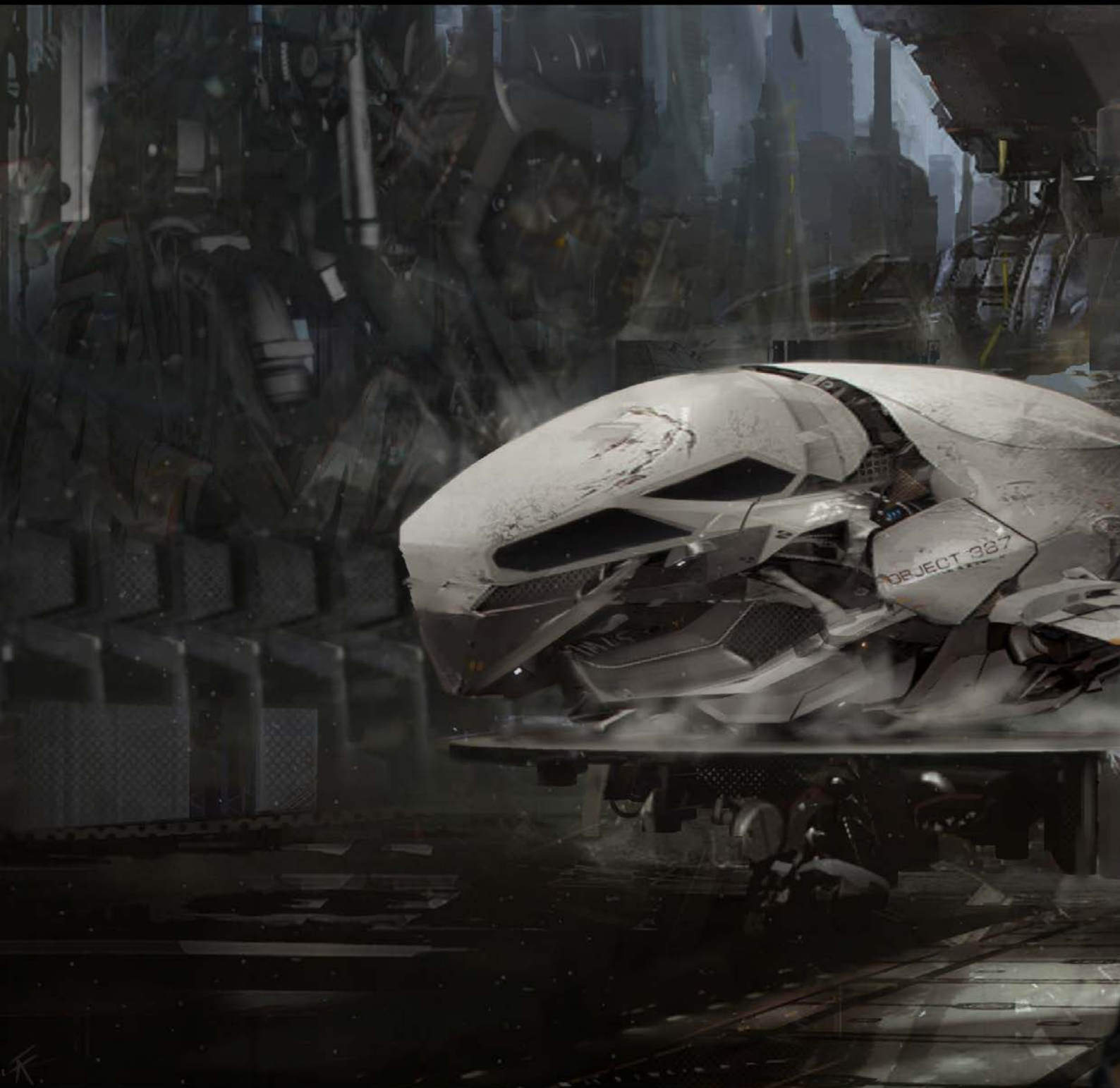
© Anton Fedotov

Arrival
Anton Fedotov
Year created: 2016
Web: anfedart.artstation.com
© Anton Fedotov

© ANTON FEDOTOV
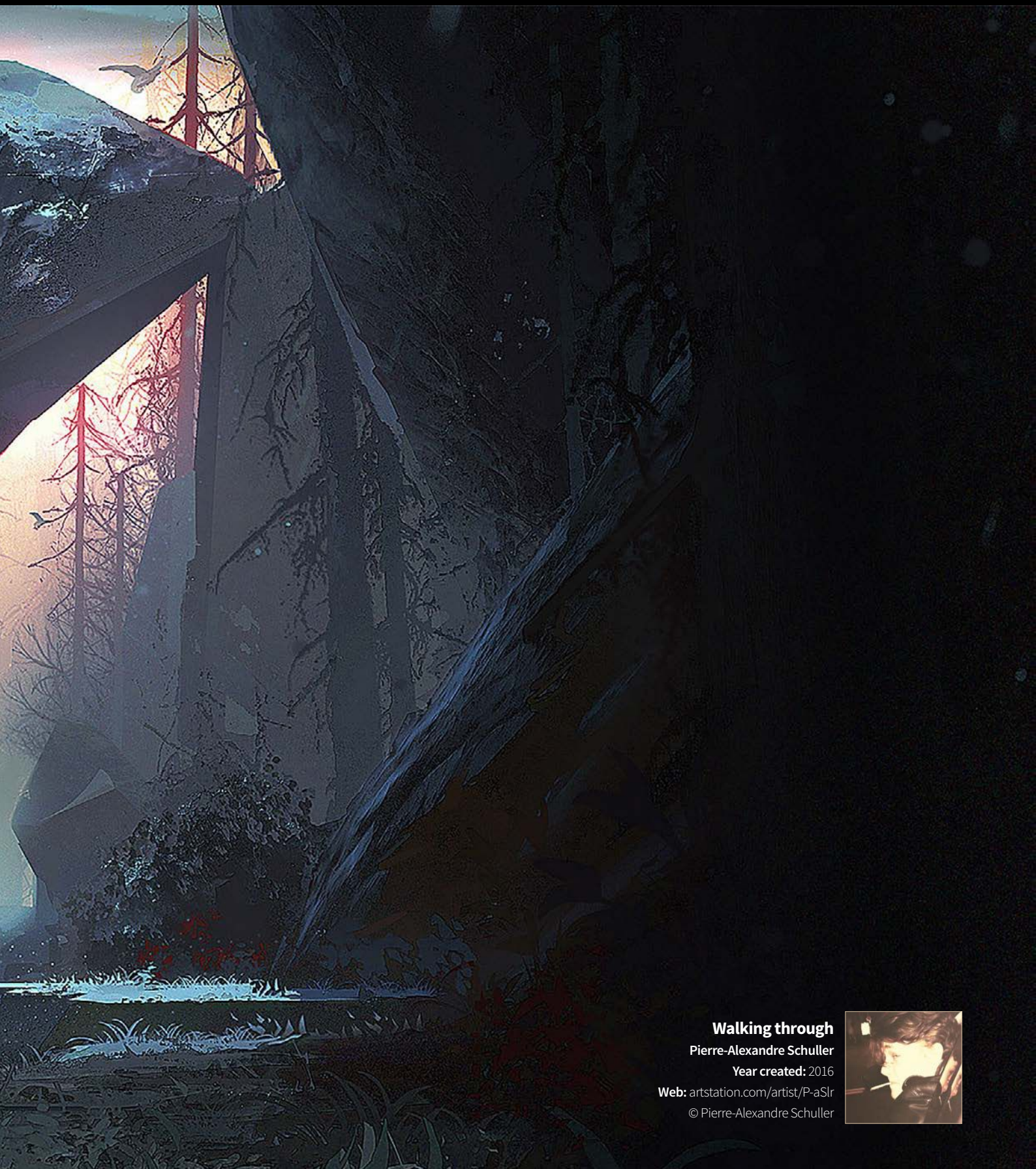
Walking through
Pierre-Alexandre Schuller
Year created: 2016
Web: artstation.com/artist/P-aSlr
© Pierre-Alexandre Schuller

The Artist

Helen Norcott
artstation.com/artist/skraww

Software Used:
Photoshop

Helen Norcott is a freelance digital artist and graphic designer based in Middlesbrough, UK. She currently works as a freelance concept artist and specializes in painting vibrant environment art.

Speed paint an underwater monster

Helen Norcott teaches you how to put together an ethereal underwater seascape featuring a threatening monster ▶

● Create multiple thumbnails focusing on basic forms to generate different ideas
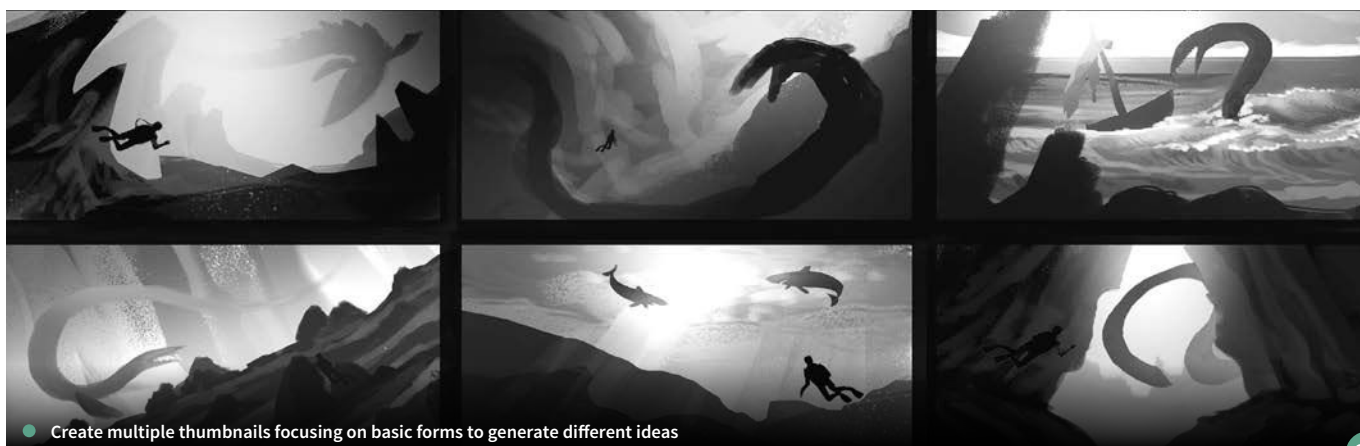
01

Learn how to create drama in an eerie underwater scene…

In this speed painting tutorial I will demonstrate how you can quickly create an imposing underwater scene, featuring a dangerous fantasy sea monster. We'll start by generating ideas with thumbnails, and explore scale to add drama. We will also make use of several of Photoshop's tools including Dodge, Burn, and the Tilt-Shift filter to add texture and depth to an underwater painting.

01 **Thumbnail ideas:** The first stage is to generate lots of ideas with thumbnail drawings. Sketch out several different thumbnails as this will help you come up with alternate ideas. Try not to go into too much detail when creating thumbnails. At this point, you want to focus on defining the basic forms of the image, and the values from background to foreground.

Think about how you want your image to feel. Here I want it to feel claustrophobic and dangerous, so keeping the entire scene underwater works best for this. I also want my monster to be subtle at this stage, as the suggestion of danger is often creepier than showing it in its entirety. It is important to think about the shape of your monster too. I want mine to feel serpentine, as the long curved shape can add to interesting compositions.

> **"If there are elements of different thumbnails that you would like to include, try merging them into the same composition"**

02 **Refining the thumbnail:** Now with multiple thumbnail ideas, you can

● Merge elements from different thumbnails to create something new
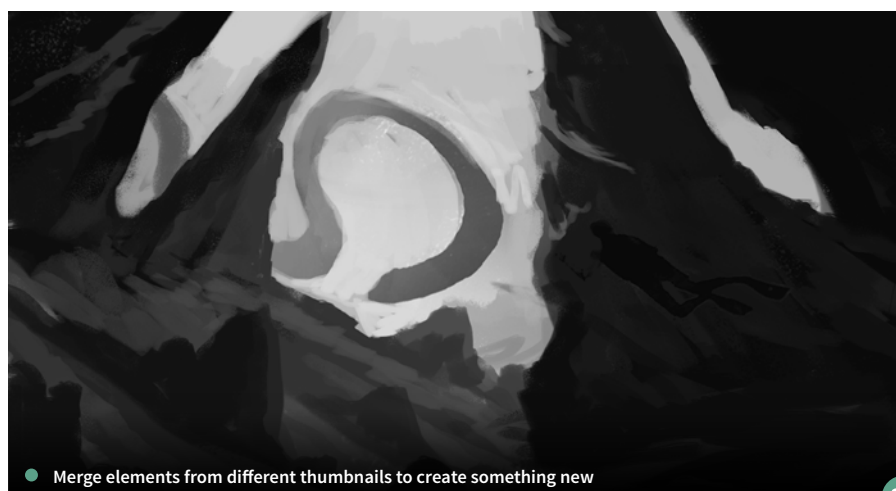
02

create the initial composition. If there are elements of different thumbnails that you would like to include, try merging them into the same composition. Here I blend two thumbnails that I like, taking the tilted foreground and serpent shape of one, and combining it with the claustrophobic rock formations of another.

Try several different options until you are happy with the feel of the image. Remember that it is much easier to make huge compositional changes at this stage, rather than later, when you have spent time and effort adding detail and color.

03 **Checking the composition :** I feel that the landscape format of my composition does not truly show how deep the ocean is, and how threatening the monster could be to the diver. If you want to show dramatic height, try adding verticality to your scene, and emphasize the height and sharpness of the rocks.

Continue to keep your forms loose at this stage, only focusing on very simple shapes. We will add color before we continue with any specific details. ▶

● Composition is the focus at this stage and it is important to make changes before you add details
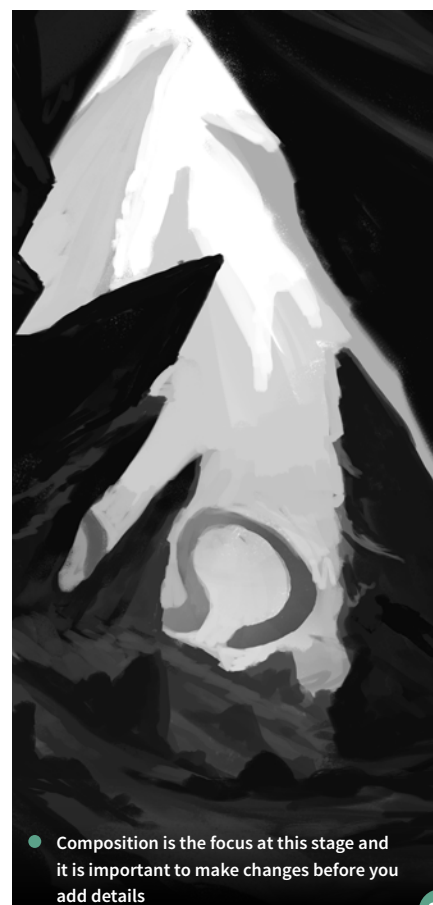
03

04 **Playing with scale:** With the image vertical the rocks draw the eye along the height of the scene. However, there is a large amount of negative space behind the rocks, and the serpent monster looks a bit small and unimpressive. Now is a good time to play with the scale to see if a better result can be made.

I remove the original serpent and replace it with a much more enormous beast, which clearly dwarfs the diver by comparison. This contrast makes the diver look much more isolated and threatened, and works well to make the serpent appear dangerous and imposing.

> "With the Range function set to Highlights, very subtly use the Dodge tool to create a glow behind the serpent"

05 **Values and lighting:** As the scene is underwater, it is a good idea to reign in the values so that the contrast isn't so harsh. Use the Levels tool to lighten the black tones and darken the whites. Then adjust the mid-ground until you get the result you want.

A lot of people avoid the Dodge and Burn tools during digital painting, but they definitely have their uses if used carefully. With the Range function set to Highlights, very subtly use the Dodge tool to create a glow behind the serpent, and do the same with the Burn tool (also set to Highlights) around the lower half of the image.

Less is definitely more with these tools! Now that the light source is more clearly defined, introduce some dappled lighting to the foreground to keep the image balanced.

06 **Adding color layers:** Now, merge the painting into one layer and add a new

layer above it. Set this new layer to Pin Light and start to add color. With a large fuzzy brush, add the first layer of color. If you do not get the effect you desire, don't hesitate to check out the other layer blend modes until you get the required result. It can be good to experiment! Continue adding more layers and more washes of color.

07 **Balancing color layers:** Try to balance the colors used within the image. Stick to a minimal color scheme, with colors that work well together. If you find that the colors are becoming disjointed and too varied, you can also use a Photo Filter adjustment layer to add a wash of color over the whole image.

⚡ PRO TIPS
Limit textures
When speed painting, the most important thing is the composition, the atmosphere and the colors. You don't want to spend too long adding strong textures and details, as this can often distract from what you are trying to show. It is a good rule of thumb to start with large brushes and slowly work your way down to smaller detailing brushes. By working in this way the details will be balanced across the image.

● Scale can be used to make elements stand out and the difference in size between the monster and diver is a great visual contrast

04

● Take care not to use colors that are too dark or too light. High contrast is not always a good thing!

05

Adding color using layer blend modes allows you to keep your black and white values

06
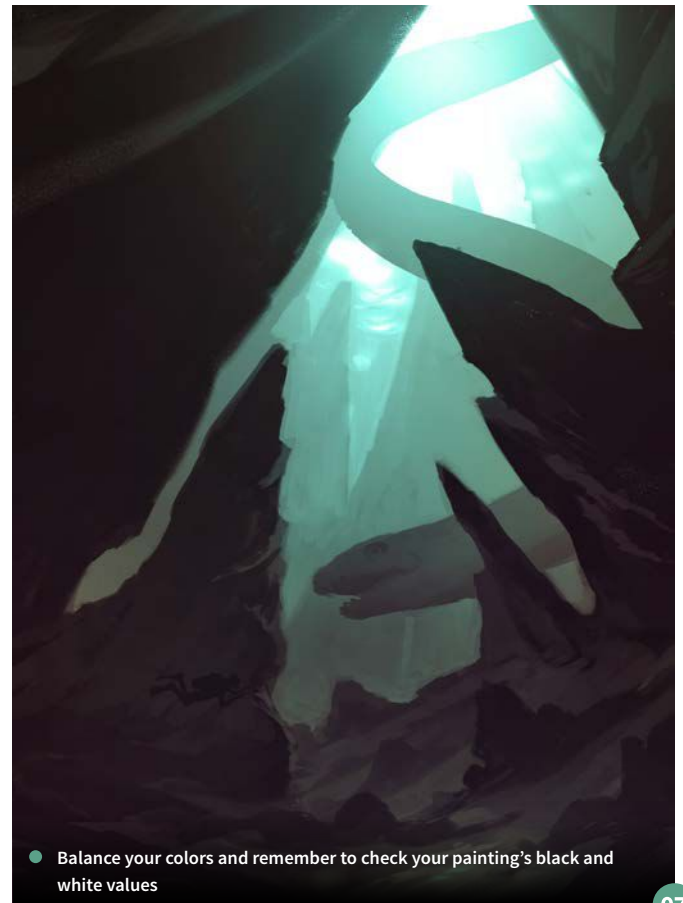
Balance your colors and remember to check your painting's black and white values

07

I add a very faint teal to the image, to unify the colors. This enhances the feeling of the scene being underwater, and gives a cold, murky look to the colors already picked. Don't forget to continue checking your values; placing a black layer above your image and setting it to color will allow you to see the values accurately.

08 **Grungy texture and details:** As the scene is underwater, there should be a lot of grime floating around making the water slightly translucent. Take a grungy texture (I use one that I make by scanning paper), and place it on a layer above the painting.

Try out a few different layer modes, and make sure to keep it subtle. Here I use the Difference layer blend mode, and set the opacity to around five- or ten-percent. This should give the water a dense, grungy appearance.

In addition to the grime, use a textured, scattered brush to gently suggest at bubbles coming from the diver's equipment. Use the same brush to paint faint bubbles around the serpent, to show that it is moving. ▶
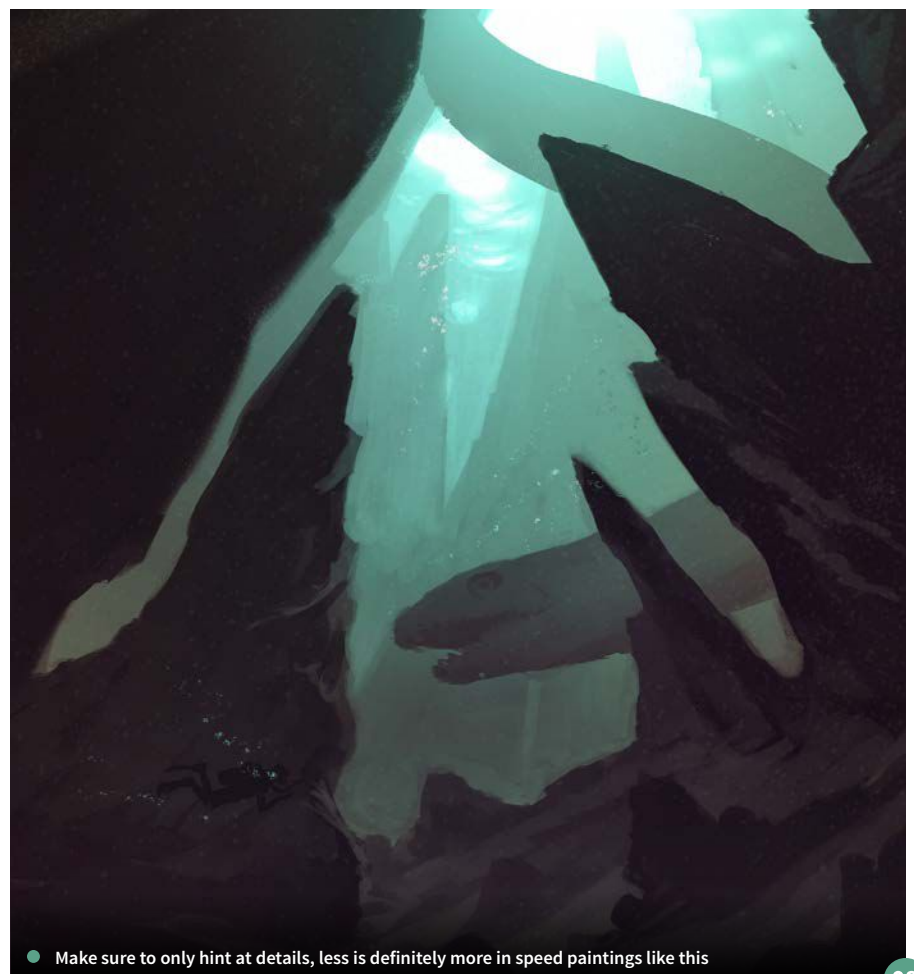
Make sure to only hint at details, less is definitely more in speed paintings like this

08

> **"Adjust the lines of the Tilt-Shift filter to mostly blur the bottom section of the image"**

09 **Foreground blur and sharpening:** To suggest more depth within the image, I use the Tilt-Shift filter to blur out the immediate foreground and some of the very top of the image. It is important not to use this too strongly, or it will ruin any sense of scale within the image, instead making it look like a miniature scene.

Adjust the lines of the Tilt-Shift filter to mostly blur the bottom section of the image. This will encourage the viewer to look past the immediate foreground to the main focus of the image – in this case the diver and the approaching monster. Once this is done, sharpen your image using the Unsharp mask, making sure that you just give the edges of the focal point the slightest sharp edges. Too much Unsharp mask can make your textures look too rough and jittery.

10 **Final touches:** Now that the painting is more or less finished, you can add a simple Noise filter to add a very faint grain to the image. I find that this adds a cinematic feel, and helps to unify all the details and colors. Don't add too much, as less than five-percent is usually required to give a nice, grainy feel.

If you are still unhappy with the colors, a good tip is to use the Variations tool (Images > Adjustments > Variations). This allows you to tweak the color scheme very accurately, so you can get it to your liking. Here, I use this tool to add some more saturation to the mid-ground of my image. ●
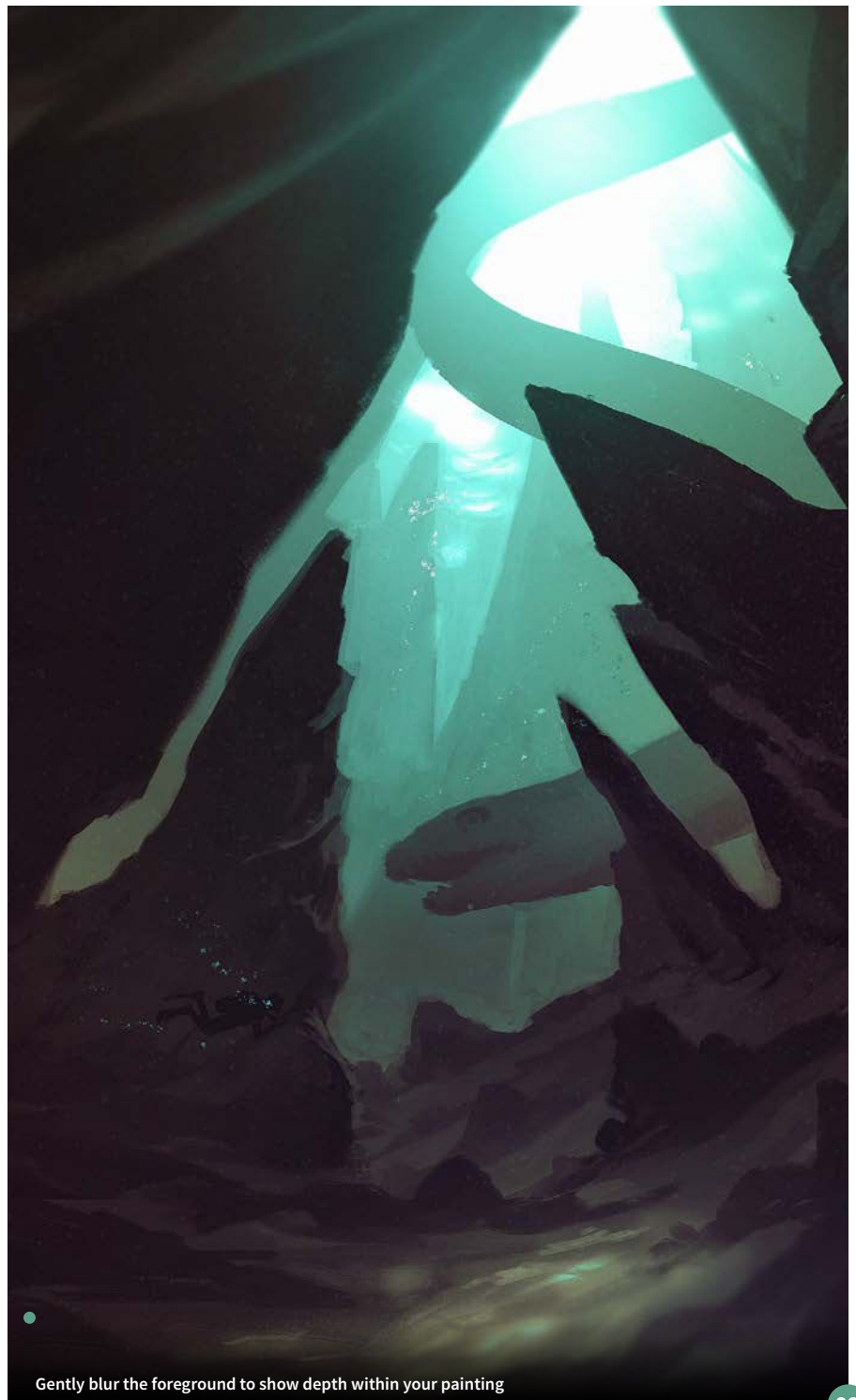
Gently blur the foreground to show depth within your painting

09

⚡ **PRO TIPS**
Keep tonal values in check

If you have spent time and effort making sure that your grayscale values are perfect, you don't want them to be ruined after adding some color. So it is a good idea to keep a spare copy of your black and white layer, to ensure the tonal values are safe no matter how much you edit the main image.

Alternatively, try to keep a plain black layer to hand. This way you can place it above your image and set it to the Color layer mode, which will show you an accurate representation of how your tonal values still look. You can also use the Desaturate tool if you wish, but I find that this does not work as accurately.

3DTOTAL'S ANATOMICAL COLLECTION:
NEW FIGURES AVAILABLE NOW

Affordable anatomical reference figures for traditional and digital artists, including male and female planar models and the impressive biosuit figure designed by Alessandro Baldasseroni!

U DID AN AWESO

HAVE A NICE SHOWER AND RELAX…

FORGET TO SWITCH TO SAFE MODE.
HANKS FOR YOUR EFFORT

BIKE LOCKED
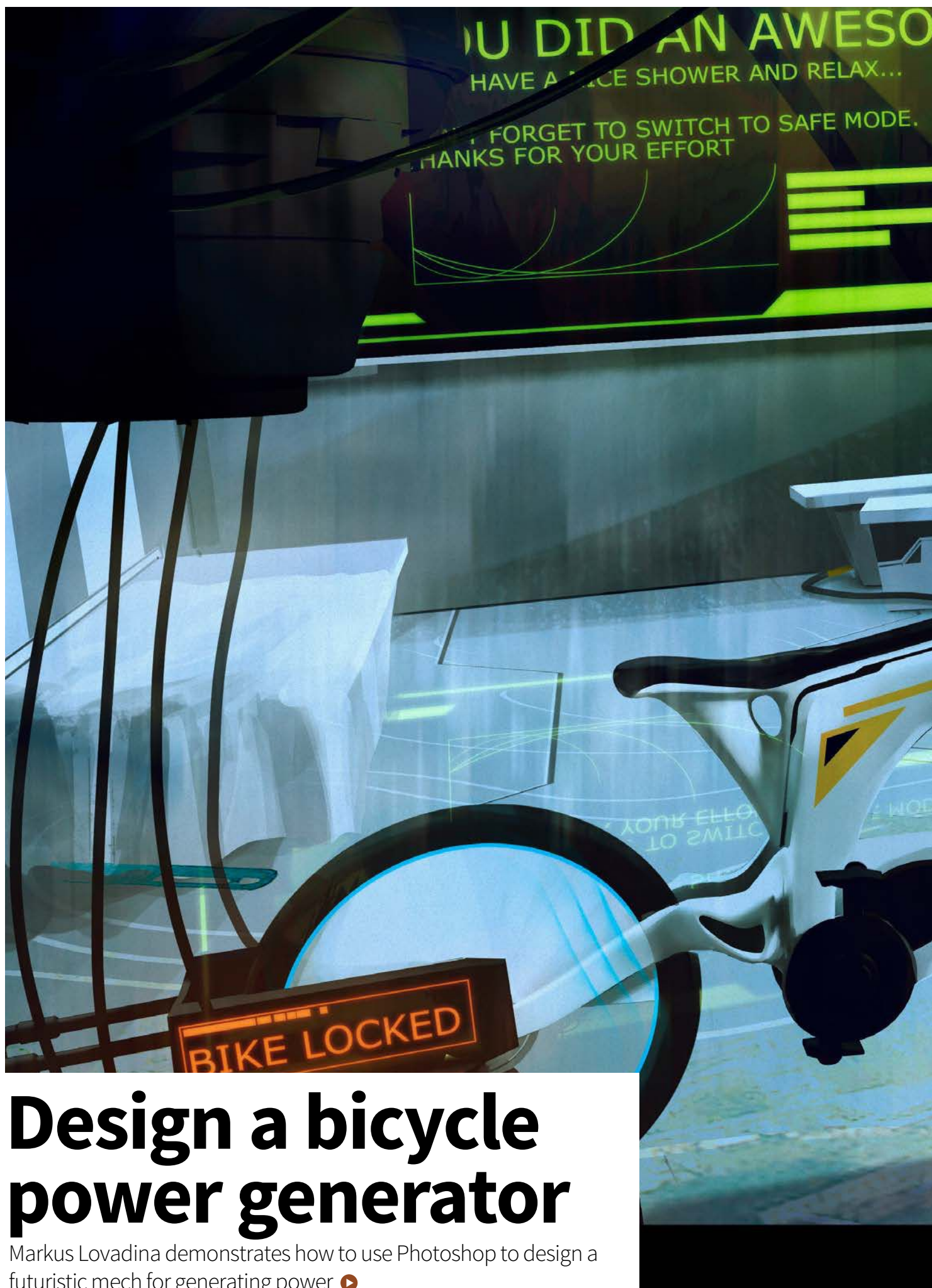
Design a bicycle power generator

Markus Lovadina demonstrates how to use Photoshop to design a futuristic mech for generating power ▶

The Artist

Markus Lovadina
artofmalo.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Markus Lovadina is a senior concept artist for the entertainment industry with over twenty years experience. He has worked on projects ranging from games and film to publishing, graphic design and commercials.

Pick up tips for efficient painting and creating futuristic details…

When I received the brief to create a bicycle power generator for this tutorial, I immediately thought it was a great topic with many possibilities. This could range from a fantasy style wooden bicycle with glowing hot embers, to a futuristic, clean sci-fi scene.

I decide on a sci-fi scene, but with a twist. Instead of going for one of those super stylish penthouse apartments, I will paint more of a student room scene. It will still be set up in a futuristic world, but with a messy touch to the environment.

As for the tutorial itself, I will try to capture and explain my process for this project as simply as possible. My process tends to differ from project to project and really depends on the topic.

For this one, I will start with some sketching, moving on to a final rough sketch, and developing a silhouette that will be very useful when putting the scene together. My focus will be to set up the entire scene and to get as much storytelling in it as possible, rather than solely focusing on the generator itself.

01 **Sketching:** Sketching is always a great way to start a new project. It

● Sketch with whatever you feel most comfortable to bring some ideas to paper
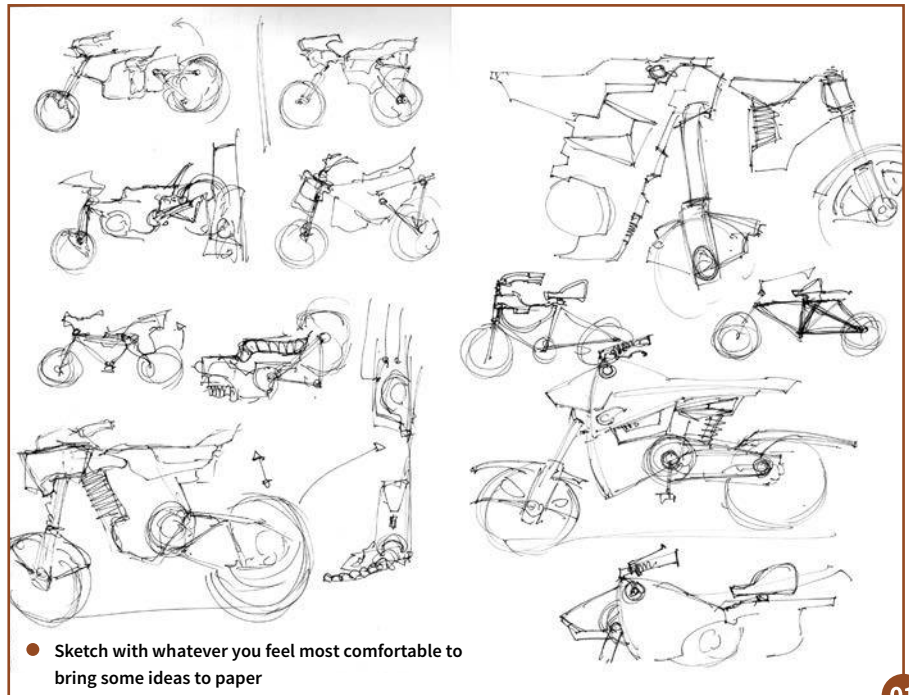
01

really gives you the freedom to explore, free your mind, and create new and interesting things. Since this tutorial is about a bicycle power generator it would be a good idea to start with the bicycle, especially as the shape of the bicycle could provide enough hints and ideas for the audience to understand how the whole generator would work. Try to explore different shapes and looks, but always keep the sci-fi theme in mind. To be more precise, ensure there are simple geometric shapes, and of course a logical functionality on top.

02 **Final rough sketch:** After you have found an interesting shape which combines the sci-fi and functionality aspects I mentioned, move on to a more finalized sketch. Scan in all of your sketches and play around with copying and pasting. I do not find anything that works, so I start with a blank new file and sketch in a rough silhouette. Once you are happy with the shape, create a new layer on top and use the standard Round brush to draw the outline. The outline will be essential for the shape as it will need to be clear how the bike functions with the generator.

● The sketch has futuristic shapes that can be used for the bike and generator. It's fun to reuse earlier sketches and combine them to see if anything sparks fresh ideas

02

Check the Rubber Band option
for the Pen tool
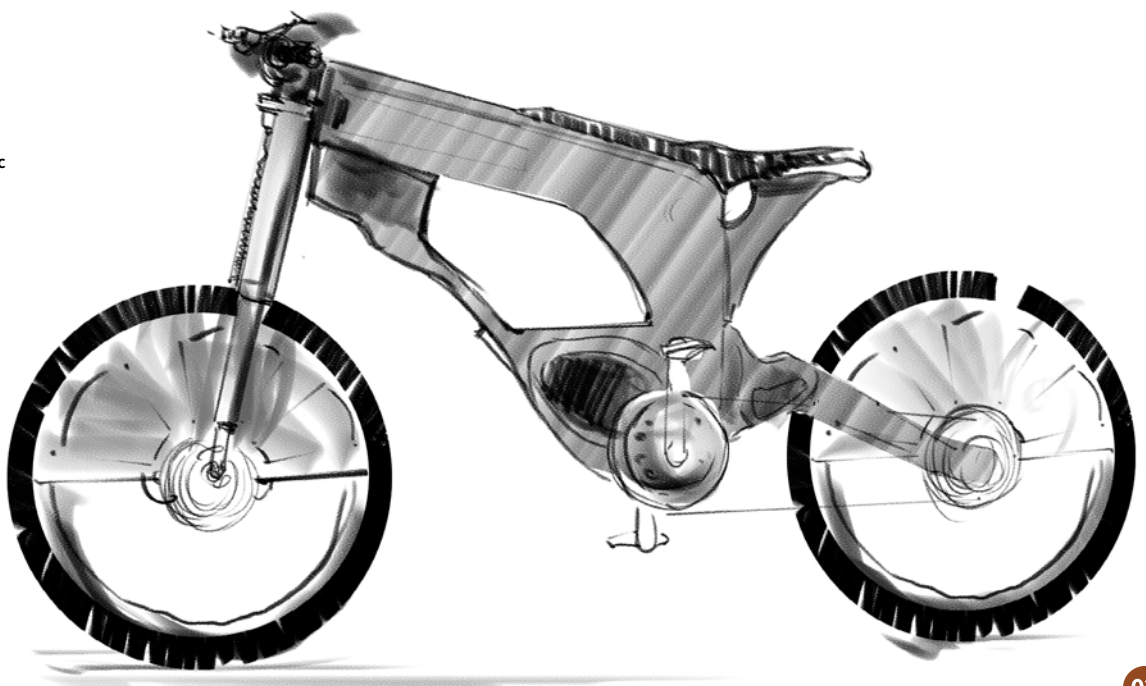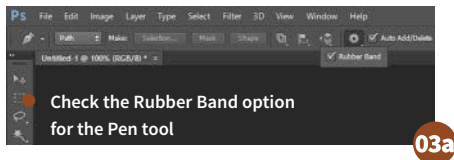
03a

03 **Path tools:** Use path tools to finalize the outline of the bike. Path tools, such as the Pen tool, allow you to be precise when drawing, and so can be quite handy if you have to work as accurately as possible. Paths are really helpful for creating straight shapes, and are in my opinion a "must" when you have to work with rounded edges or more complex shapes.

Check the box for the Rubber Band option on the Pen tool (image 03a), which shows you precisely the path that you create (image 03b). A quick note on the production side of things: try to avoid too many anchor points. This could cause issues if you have to print anything vector based. For example, a circle is just made out of four anchor points; no more, no less.

> **"A clear shape will allow you to quickly flesh out the design to fit the scene later on"**

04 **Final bicycle shape:** As the shape of the bicycle will become quite handy later in the painting process, spend some time developing a clean silhouette of it. This shape is produced entirely using the Pen's path tool as described in the previous step. Having a clear shape will allow you to quickly flesh out the design to fit the scene later on, and is essential

● Working with a path tool gives you the most precise and accurate shape and allows you to create a customized shape
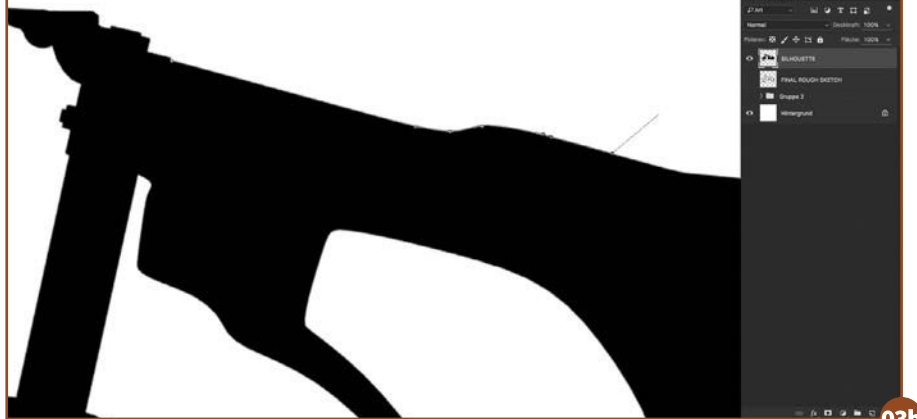
03b
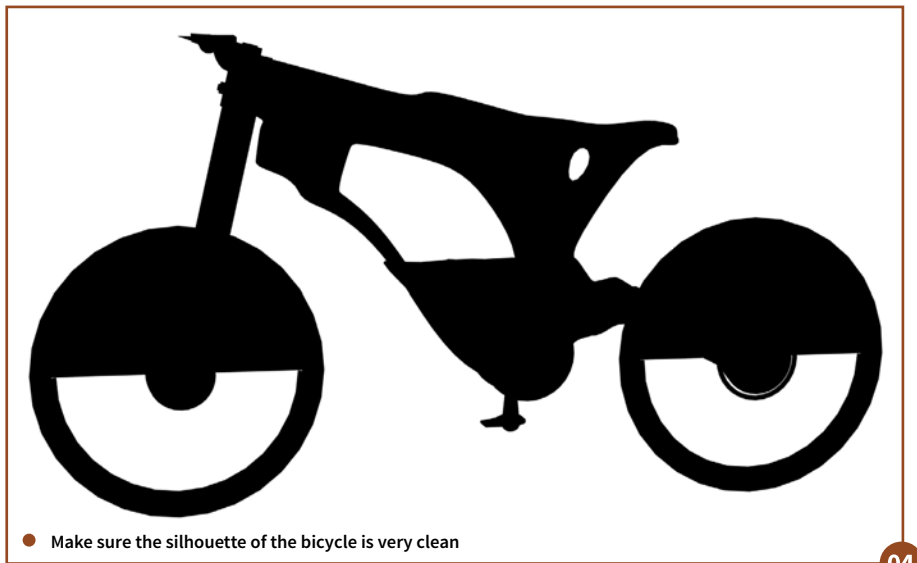
● Make sure the silhouette of the bicycle is very clean

04

for portraying how the whole generator will work, without the generator being the only focus in the scene. At this stage I think the shape works well

so I am ready to move on to the next step: the generator. Save the bike as a separate document.

05 **Ideation for the generator:** The brief for this tutorial is to create a bicycle power generator. What could this look like? How would it work? With these questions in mind, start to scribble directly in Photoshop. Keep it quite loose to see if there is anything that jumps out.

From this I develop the idea of a kind of docking station. To do this, create a new document of roughly 2,500 × 2,500 pixels, add a new layer, and start to draw a rough shape for the docking station. The entire sketch process is carried out using the Round brush and a square brush for the silhouettes.

In this step, focus purely on shapes and not on details. Details will change during the painting process, but add some hints of details for a better proportional aspect. One important step is to decide how the bike will fit into ▶

● It is all about shapes, at least at this early stage. Shapes and silhouettes are more easily changed than an entire painting

05

the generator. Based on a docking station principle, the idea is simple: drive into the docking station and "upload" the energy that you have already produced during your day's cycling. Or just dock on and spend a bit of time cycling in your docking station. Both of these methods will power-up the energy.

06 **The scene setup:** All the shapes and ideas for the bike and generator are now set, so it is finally time for the real painting. I talked briefly in the introduction about the scene I had in mind, and now consider more of the details: a student room that is a bit messy, with sci-fi elements such as huge screens, a sliding bed, and a simplified chair and table. All these elements will be quite clean in form and function to add to the sci-fi theme.

Create a new document and a new layer. I like to have as many layers as possible as it allows me to go back and forth within my file, so I don't have to worry if I make a wrong stroke. On the newly created layer use the Lasso tool to draw the floor. With the selection made, paint in rough color and play around with the Texture setting in the Brush palette. Follow a similar procedure for the wall on the left- and right-hand side.

With the floor and the wall in place you can easily create some perspective guidelines on another layer, just to make sure everything is positioned correctly. The next step is to draw a fridge and a shower using the Lasso tool on a new layer again, painting with the Round or Square brush, and playing around with textures and structures.

07 **First details:** The room and perspective are set so we can move on to the first details. Add a new layer and paint the rough shapes of a table and a chair. The painting can be loose since it will be defined later on.

Satisfied with the look of chair and table, start to use the Lasso tool to make the edges and lines sharp and crisp. Then invert the selection (Ctrl+I) and erase all the brushstrokes to get a clean line. The design patterns are made the same way, using the Lasso tool, but this time draw more precisely and fill them with a round hard-edged brush.

The bed on the right-hand side is made in a similar way, but with one big difference: the blanket can't be straight edged so this requires

Once you have an idea in mind, the rest is just filling blank space with color, but it is important to make sure your perspective is correct

06

Add small details to fill the room and to set up the mood

07

⚡ PRO TIPS
Get used to 3D

Sometimes a task can require working in a 3D environment, or at least the task will be easier if you can work in any of the industry-standard applications. While I remain in Photoshop here, designing a bicycle power generator has the potential to be such a task.

It is fun to work in just a 2D environment and I really enjoy it, but the more complex the task is, the harder it can be to do in 2D. Becoming familiar in a 3D software package of your own choice is therefore not a bad idea. Just image if you had to design the inner workings of the power generator properly. It would be possible to do it in 2D, but it would take so much time.

a bit of freehand painting. Make the base with the Round brush and add more and more wrinkles with a squeezed square brush. You can see some of the overlapping brushstrokes on the blanket in the lower right-hand corner of image 07. They work nicely for a painterly feeling, but would destroy the look of a clean-edged shape such as the table. The lines on the floor are painted straight with a round brush (with no settings at all) on a new layer. Then transform (Ctrl+T) it based on the perspective lines you have on another layer for reference.

08 **First color splashes:** Now it is time for some color splashes. Create a new layer and fill the selection you have drawn of a rug with a reddish-orange tone. Add another layer on top and use a customized brush with a pattern. Paint the pattern straight (frontal) and then transform the layer to match the perspective. The pattern layer is set to Soft Light as this will make the pattern more subtle and not too bright.

09 **Bringing in the bike:** Since we have spent quite a lot of time
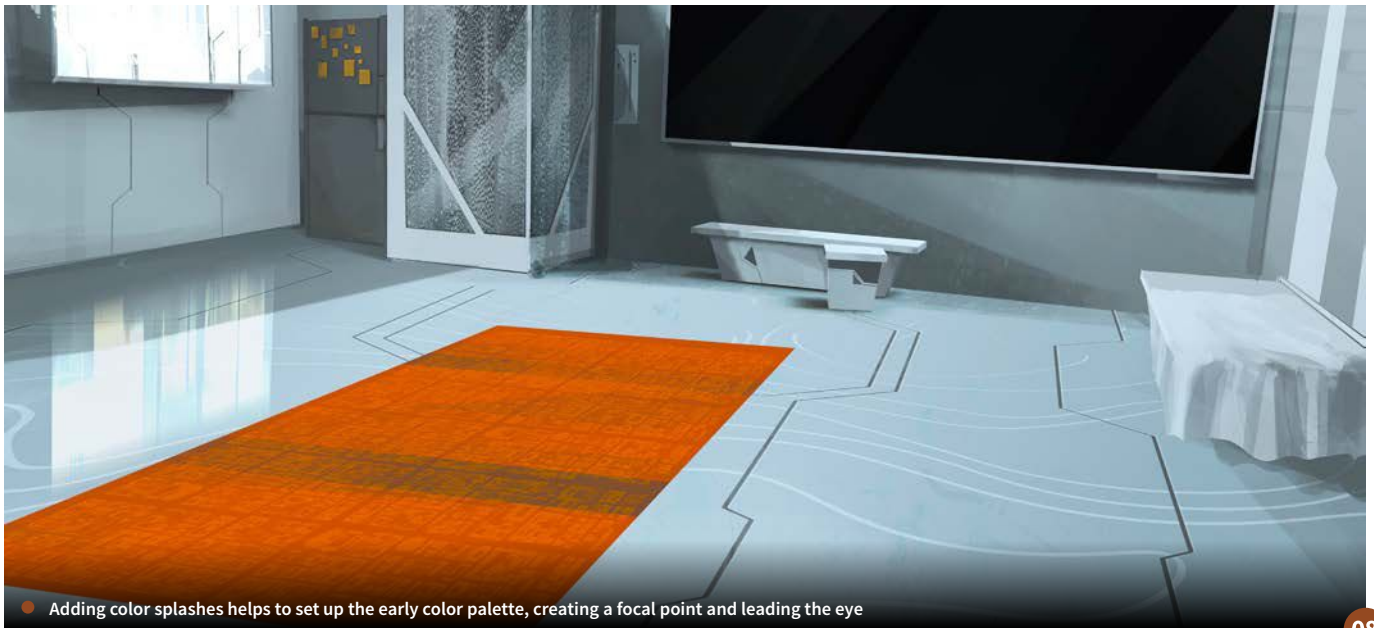
Adding color splashes helps to set up the early color palette, creating a focal point and leading the eye

08

Preparing elements early will definitely speed up your process and in this case gives enough information to get started

09

developing a clean shape for the bike, it is now time to use it properly. Open the bike document, select the bike, and copy and paste it into the scene document.

The next step is to transform it so that it fits the perspective and also creates a pleasing dramatic angle. The idea is that the bike points towards the shower. Why? You will find out more later. At the moment we are only concerned about having a shape of a bike since this already gives enough information to make it appear three-dimensional when adding detail in the next step.

10 Details: The focus now is on the bike. By Ctrl+clicking on the bike layer, get a selection of just the bike, and as usual the

next step is to create a new layer on top. If you press Ctrl+H you can hide the selection while it is still active. With the newly created layer, start to paint a light gray in as the base color for the bike. Keep the strokes quite loose and see what happens. Sometimes "happy accidents" are quite useful, as they are in this case. The loosely painted strokes give the impression of a layered material. Based on these strokes, add more and more details, varying with the Hard and Soft Round brushes. The "stickers" on the frame are made with the Lasso tool on a separate layer, set to Overlay.

In terms of details in the rest of the room, on the left-hand side of the scene is a shelf-like object. This could be a futuristic bookshelf with

a transparent user interface (UI) to show the content. The light effect of the reflection on the floor is made from an old image, where I reused a part of the painting. Copy in the part, transform it to match the perspective, and set it to Color Dodge. Then duplicate the layer, flip it vertically, and move it down, so that it can be recognized as a reflection. To make a reflection blurry, use the Motion Blur filter. There is no rule to this, so you have to play around with the angles and amount until you are happy.

Finally, add a silhouette of a person taking a shower. This is the reason why the bike was pointed towards the shower earlier, to lead the viewer's eye to the human element in the scene. I pick a female silhouette. On top of the actual ▶

layers, copy and paste in another part of my previous painting and match the perspective, but this time it is set to Darken with a Transparency of 65%. You could change the look of such a Darken layer by either reducing the transparency or by adjusting the levels. Press Ctrl+L and play around with the high tones, mid-tones, and shadows.

11 **Flipping the canvas:** After the previous step, merge all visible layers into one by pressing Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E. This keeps all the other layers and adds a merged layer on top. Flip the layer to refresh your eyes and to see how the composition in this direction looks. I actually like it more this way. It has more dynamism and leads the eye a bit more comfortably.

On top, add a photo filter from the adjustment options at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose the Cooling Filter 82 option and Underwater. This is a simple way to play around with color moods and slight (or sometimes dramatic) changes of the color values.

12 **Telling the story:** The scene is mostly set up so it is now a good point to start to tell the story. This can be achieved through simple hints, personal elements, or, since we are talking sci-fi, UI elements.

On a new layer paint in some really simple strokes that give a hint of clothing lying on the floor. Like the bike, this also points in the direction of the shower. To communicate the functionality of the power generator add UI elements to it, such as the Bike Locked indicator you can see in image 12. I mentioned earlier that my idea was not to just focus on the generator and how it will work. Instead I want to create a scene where the generator is part of the story and is shown in a more subtle way. This is another reason I only offer hints of how and why it exists in the scene.

13 **Big-screen user interface:** UIs are a really great way to tell a story or give hints of a story. Sometimes you see an image and ask yourself: What? Why? A small UI element in a sci-fi scene tells you only a little bit of the story, but suddenly the whole scene can make sense. Simple things are often the most important ones.

For the UI elements on the large screen in the background make a new document of 2,500 × 2,500 pixels (we will copy it back to the scene later on). Don't worry too much about how it looks as

Sometimes loose brushstrokes create interesting effects, shapes, or overlays leading to really interesting results

Flipping the canvas from time to time not only refreshes the eye, but it can also lead to a more pleasing composition

Little elements can tell a story or give a hint of a story, which allows the viewer to make their own interpretation

> **"UIs are a really great way to tell a story or give hints of a story"**

long as it has the right information in it. However, the nicer it does look, the more attention it will receive, and the faster the information will be transferred. I really enjoy working on graphic design (I was a graphic designer for twenty years), but keep in mind that you can easily become lost in details. It is all about the story and not just the UI element in the background. In this case, it is necessary to point the story towards the bike, the fully recharged energy generator, and

to some kind of AI that gives our student advice. With the new document, keep all elements on separate layers so that each stroke, line, and block has its own layer.

These layers can be easily duplicated by pressing and holding the Alt key and moving the object in any direction. As soon as you are happy with the look, group all the layers, duplicate, and merge them.

14 **Adding the UI:** Copy the layer which you have just merged and match it with the big screen in the background. The next step is to duplicate the layer and add some Gaussian Blur. Keep the Radius low and if necessary repeat the effect (Ctrl+F). Then set the layer to Color Dodge and see if you like the result. If not, press Ctrl+L and re-adjust the highlights until you are satisfied.

As we have a glossy floor in the apartment, add in the green UI reflection by duplicating the Color Dodge layer and flipping it vertically. Then move it down and erase all the parts that overlay elements that are not glossy or are in the foreground. Sometimes adding a motion blur with a low Distance number can add to the look.

15 **Final touches:** All is set and the only things that are left are the small but final touches. On a new layer paint in a shadow for the bike, blur it with the Gaussian Blur, and

● Graphic design and concept art are a good combination; both ways of working and creating design can be really helpful

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⚡ **PRO TIPS**
Take a break

If you have finished with a scene, I think the best thing you can do is take a break and go back to it after a couple of minutes. This gives you a fresh eye and maybe you will spot some required changes you did not see before. If not, save and call it complete.

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set the layer to Darken. On the next new layer paint in the cables on the upper left-hand side with a simple round hard-edged brush. Select the cables by pressing Ctrl and add a new layer. With the Eyedropper tool, select the green color from the screen and paint in some highlights. The strokes could be bold as you can erase the parts that look odd or are unnecessary for a highlight. Then make a new layer and with the Gradient tool create a white-ish round gradient on top of the shelf. This one is set to Soft Light. Once again

on a new layer, use a round orange gradient on the left side, also set it to Soft Light. The final step is to create a new layer, fill it with white, and add a Noise effect. This is set to Monochromatic, Gaussian, and has a low percentage amount.

When you are happy with the look, merge all layers and add a Sharpen filter. You could add an Unsharp mask if you like super crisp edges. On the next page you can see the final sci-fi-style student apartment with a bicycle power generator! ●

The Artist

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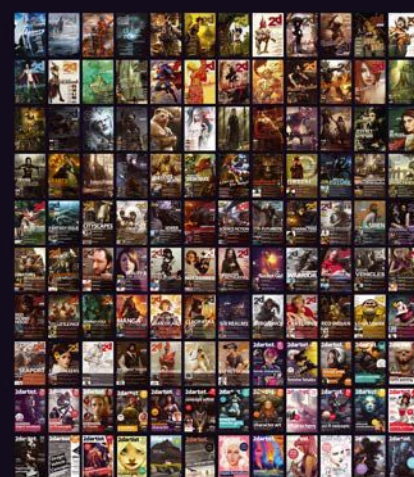
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Design a battle shaman

Develop a powerful pose, costume and symbolic accessories for a
historically inspired fantasy figure ▶

Get top tips for checking the scale and pose of your characters...

This tutorial will focus on how to paint an illustration showcasing a character and costume design concept for a fantasy female battle shaman. In preparing for this tutorial I was inspired by imagery of early and present-day European shamanic rituals and costume. A common theme in shamanism is the use of animal skulls, furs and imagery; for example Viking berserks would adorn themselves with bear furs and trophies in order to channel the savagery of that animal in battle.

With this goal in mind I make some quick thumbnails and exploratory sketches. These sketches don't have to be perfect; after all it is the final image that people are going to be viewing. I tend to fill sketchbooks with these sketches, often in ink, and small enough to fit a group on a single page. Sketches can be small scribbles on post-it notes, barely legible when you look back at them ten minutes later, but they are enough to help you explore some options before you commit to working on a final piece.

Another useful planning tool is to create a mood board of informative reference materials which you can consult as the image develops. It is good to cover a spectrum of influences here, as it may result in you finding inspiration from a source you hadn't initially anticipated. With both of these preparations done it is time to begin creating the image!

01 **Dressing the pose:** To begin, start by sketching your character in the pose you have in mind from your preparatory sketches. I know that I want to depict a strong female warrior shaman in a heroic pose. I also like to get an idea for the face as early as possible so make sure to roughly place some features in this early phase.

Use a small hard Round brush to sketch out some options for the costume. You are going to need to modify the pose and dress the figure later, so it is okay to be loose in this stage. However, keep your sketches as variations on a theme so you don't deviate too far from your original idea.

02 **Blocking in colors:** Decide on one of these ideas and quickly block in the ▶

● Figuring out the pose first, with the character near-nude, can make dressing the character easier

01

● By using layers with locked transparency you can prevent color from leaving the confines you have already established
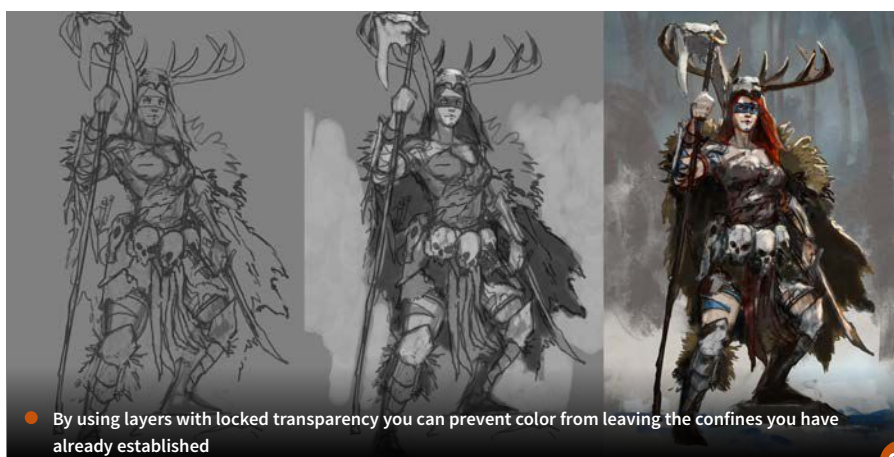
02

⚡ PRO TIPS
Using custom brushes

Custom brushes can be extremely useful and are often key to painting in Photoshop. More often than not I find myself thinking outside the box when it comes to using custom brushes. Just because the brush is a particular shape you are not limited to painting just that. In this case a chalk or charcoal effect brush gets a new use as a means of implying chainmail texture. That being said you can still achieve all of this and more using the simple default Round brushes, after all think of the effects some artists can achieve with just a pencil.
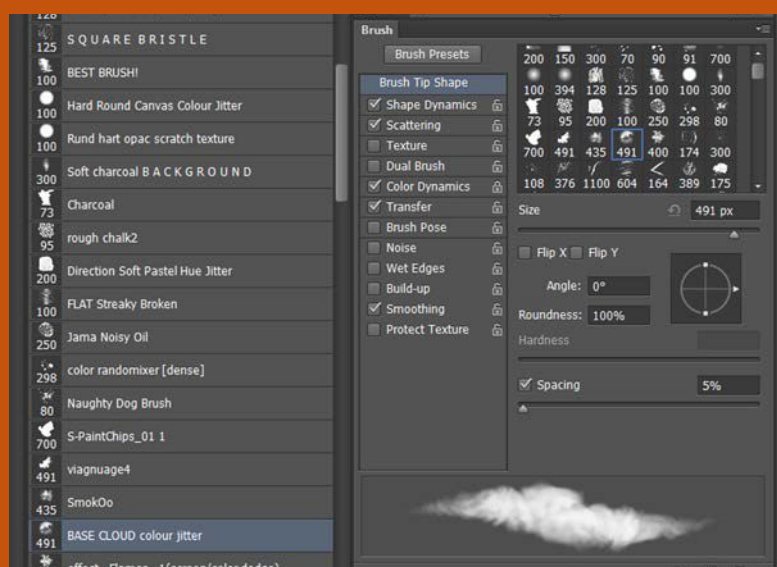
colors you have in mind. Make sure you keep your lines on a separate layer at this point, adding color to the silhouette on another layer below. You can then use the "/" key to lock the pixels on each layer, preventing your strokes from leaving the confines of the pixels on the line or silhouette layers. This is a very quick way of getting an idea of the colors in the image with little effort.

03 **Checking proportions:** Once you are happy with the color sketch, return to check the proportions of the figure. I have a tendency to make figures too tall and they are often clearly characterized by a small head. To make sure the character's height is correct, quickly crop out a copy of the head and use this to measure seven-and-a-half times the height of the head. This length feels heroic in proportion yet it is still believable. On this basis adjust the size of the character's head until it fits the scale, thus correcting the proportional error.

> **"I like to try and keep the entire figure progressing at the same rate as much as I can before honing in on particular details"**

04 **Sneaking up on color:** As I progress I tend to almost sneak up on the color and value. I like to try and keep the entire figure progressing at the same rate as much as I can before honing in on particular details. Obviously there are times such as when you are working on a character's face where you will need to give more detail before returning elsewhere to bring the image to a unified level of finish. At this point you can still keep it quite simple by just beginning to block in the light and shadow. Refining colors will come at a later stage.

05 **Adjusting the face:** I realize that I need to correct the placement and symmetry of the facial features. Conveniently in this case the character has war paint which is a

Make a scale using copies of the character's head to check the height of the figure is correct

03

useful gauge to judge how much the placement of facial features needs to be corrected.

By using the Lasso tool together with Free Transform you can cut out features and correct their arrangement. Continue working on lighting the figure too, constantly keeping a top right corner lighting scheme in mind. Use a Color Balance adjustment layer to shift the background towards blue.

⚡ **PRO TIP**
Using shortcuts for speed

Whether making a speed painting, or rendering a full illustration, any trick that can help cut even a little time out of your workflow is useful. I make use of keyboard shortcuts as well as several custom actions bound to hotkeys. Several of the default keyboard shortcuts are towards the right of the keyboard, and being left handed it makes sense for me to map custom actions to this side. As a result I have the function keys F8-F11 mapped to quickly create new layers with set blend modes for ease of access.

Begin to work up the color of the image, but avoid getting caught up in details

04
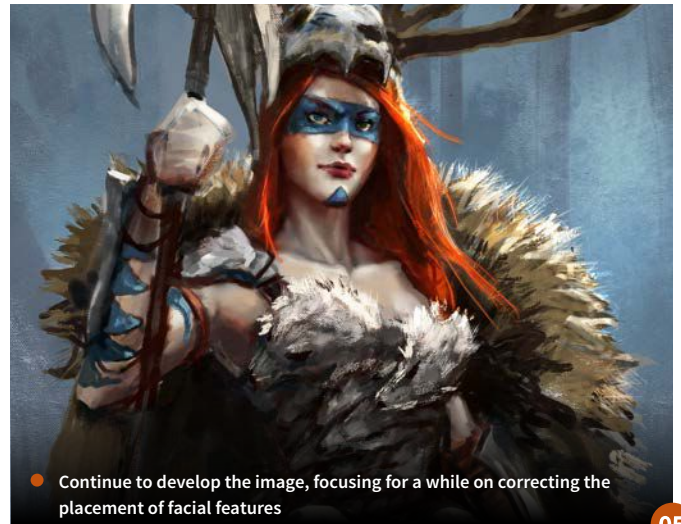
Continue to develop the image, focusing for a while on correcting the placement of facial features

05
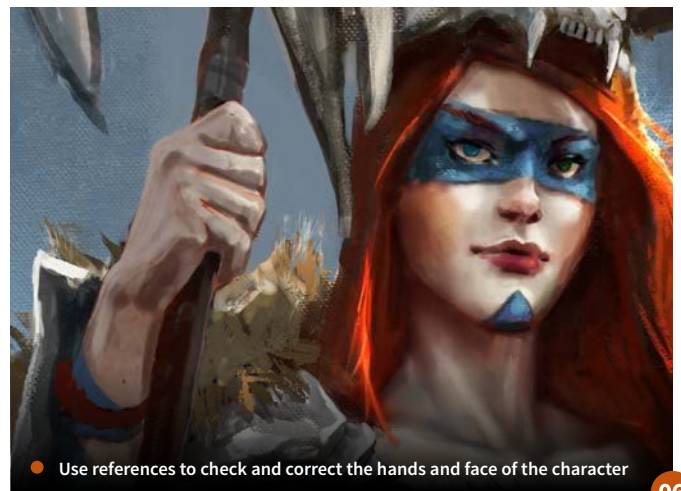
Use references to check and correct the hands and face of the character

06

06 **Correcting the hands:** The face tends to be the focal point of a figurative image, as we naturally seek out faces in everything. After the face, the hands tend to be the next port of call for the viewer, and as hard as they are to draw, hands can be very informative within an image.

In order to paint convincing hands grab some reference and compare and refine the hands of your character. I know the sword hand is going to fall into the shadow of the cloak, but I still make a point of painting in the detail of the fingers. At the very least it provides an opportunity to practice painting another hand position.

The addition of some hints of foliage as well as a cast shadow can really help sell the idea of a figure standing in a real space

07

07 **Further value refinement:** Steadily work up the value of the overall image. In correcting the hands in the previous step, I lightened the surrounding areas so I could better see what I was doing. Now I begin to tone down these areas again. As you progress around the image begin to indicate some detail on the ground underneath the shaman. This can be done with some loose textured strokes indicating the earth and snow, along with some rough crosshatch strokes to imply some tough grass breaking through the icy ground. Adding a dark cast shadow, and ground detail beneath the character, is also a deceptively simple way of grounding your character within the environment. ▶

“A good rule of thumb here is that the more something resembles polished metal, the higher the contrast will be in its value range”

08 **Back to the costume:** Until now I have been neglecting work on the fabric elements of the costume, so it is time to begin establishing the different materials. A good rule of thumb here is that the more something resembles polished metal, the higher the contrast will be in its value range.

Apply this theory to the elements around the character's waist. Though the material may be worn and rough, there is still a layered structure to it, and I begin to imply the effect of leather over chainmail to the material. You can achieve this texture by using relatively high contrast grays to imply light catching a metallic surface.

● Revisit and redevelop elements of the costume, adding texture and detail

08

09 **Flipping the canvas:** It is easy to become blind to your image; you get so used to looking at it you begin to gloss over some mistakes. An easy way to overcome this is by using the Flip Canvas Horizontal command (found under Image > Image rotation). This is a useful tool to have as it means that you can get a

fresh look at the image, and it also makes it quite obvious if you have a one sided composition.

I use this tool regularly so I have given it a custom hotkey for convenience. Sometimes I flip the canvas so much I forget which way the image originally faced!

10 **Facial and finer details:** At this point, begin to work on refining some of the more detailed areas of the image. Make some subtle tweaks to the facial expression before reworking some of the values to better define the facial structure. I now realize that the mass of hair is
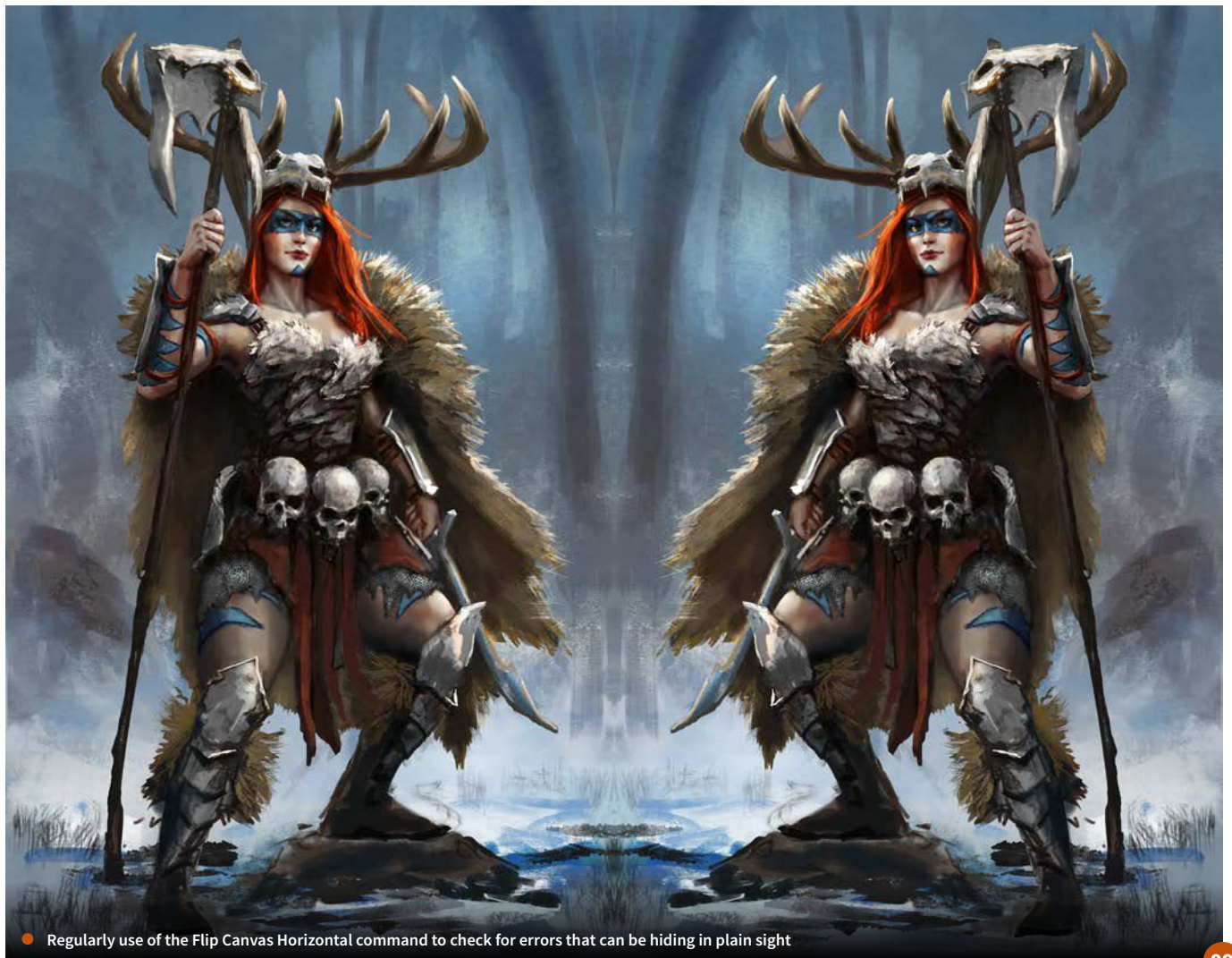
● Regularly use of the Flip Canvas Horizontal command to check for errors that can be hiding in plain sight

09

oversaturated. To correct this make a quick pass with the Sponge tool, desaturating the colors to make the red hair less eye-catching. Also begin to establish some of the details that help reinforce the design of the character, such as the medical supplies she carries.

11 **Checking the pose:** The more I work on the character, I realize something still feels off with the pose. By tracing simple abstract bones over the figure you can see the relationship between the legs and pelvis is incorrect. What is interesting is that I originally thought it was the length of the standing leg that was wrong, but it is actually the angle between the pelvis and femurs. It is a common occurrence in drawing, even ▶
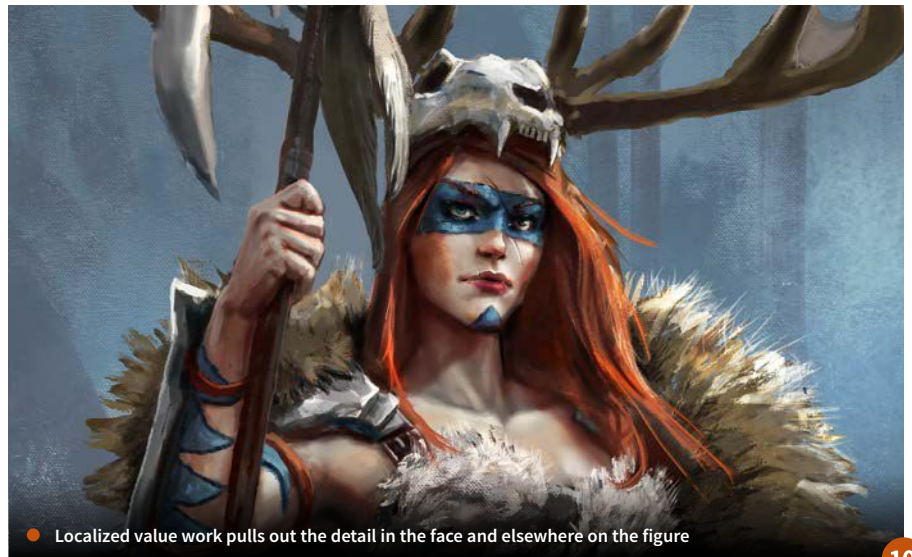
Localized value work pulls out the detail in the face and elsewhere on the figure

10

By reducing the figure to an abstraction you can double check the pose and proportions

11

from life, to believe one part is wrong, but it may actually be a different relationship that is incorrect. A quick copy and transform later fixes the position of the legs and hips.

12 **Additional details and background:** Now work up the detail of the tool belt as well as defining the details of the weapon and headdress. Add an implication of a forested background by roughly blocking out some trunk shapes, on top of which you can sketch out some branches using a branch-shaped custom brush. Try to keep this relatively simple since the goal of the image is to showcase the character. Using some cloud brushes and soft edged erasing also create some volumetric fog to create an illusion of depth behind the character.

13 **Refining the skulls:** Now it's time to address the elephant in the room, or rather, the skull atop the shaman's poleaxe. Search online for some reference images of deer skulls to get a better idea of how the shapes work together and how they can fit onto the weapon you have created for your character.

Take this opportunity to further refine the detail on the horned headdress. Add detail in the form of the depressions and insertions where muscle would attach. To continue the trend you could also add additional detail to the character in the form of scars befitting a battle hardened warrior shaman.

14 **Unifying the color:** The general warmth of the color palette of the figure is somewhat at odds with that of the environment. While at the moment these colors may be truer to the local color of the individual

● Use custom brushes based on clouds and branches to imply a background, contextualizing the character in the scene

12
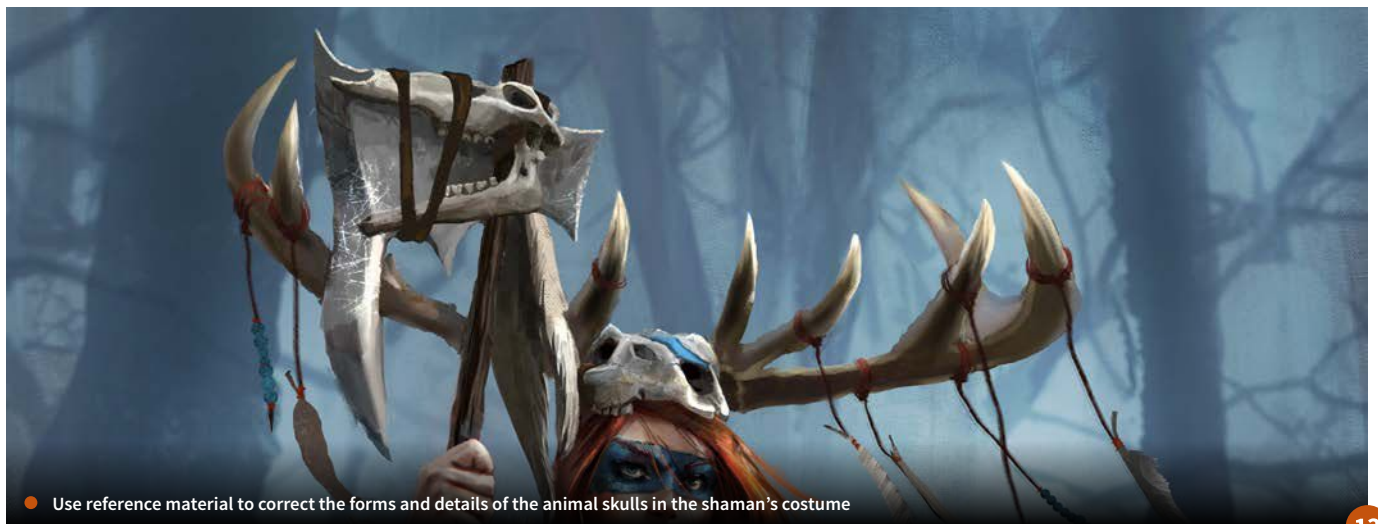
● Use reference material to correct the forms and details of the animal skulls in the shaman's costume

13

● Use Color Balance to prevent the figure from contrasting too much with the background

14

costume elements, they have not been that affected by the atmospheric color of the scene.

In order to help bring the figure into the environment use Color Balance to cool the color temperature across parts of the figure. I also use a soft round brush to add a subtle bloom to some of the highlights, and to better tie the piece together.

15 **Final tweaks and sharpening:** As you prepare to wrap up the image there are a few final tweaks to add. Make a copy of the entire image on a new layer, and then sharpen it using the Unsharp mask. Then apply a mask to this layer filled with black. That way you can selectively sharpen areas by painting white over areas you want the sharpen layer to come through.

Remember that when you apply a mask to a layer, the areas that are white in the mask are opaque and the black areas transparent. One final value check and you can sign the image to complete it. ●

● Make some last minute checks, tweaks and adjustments then sign your finished work

15
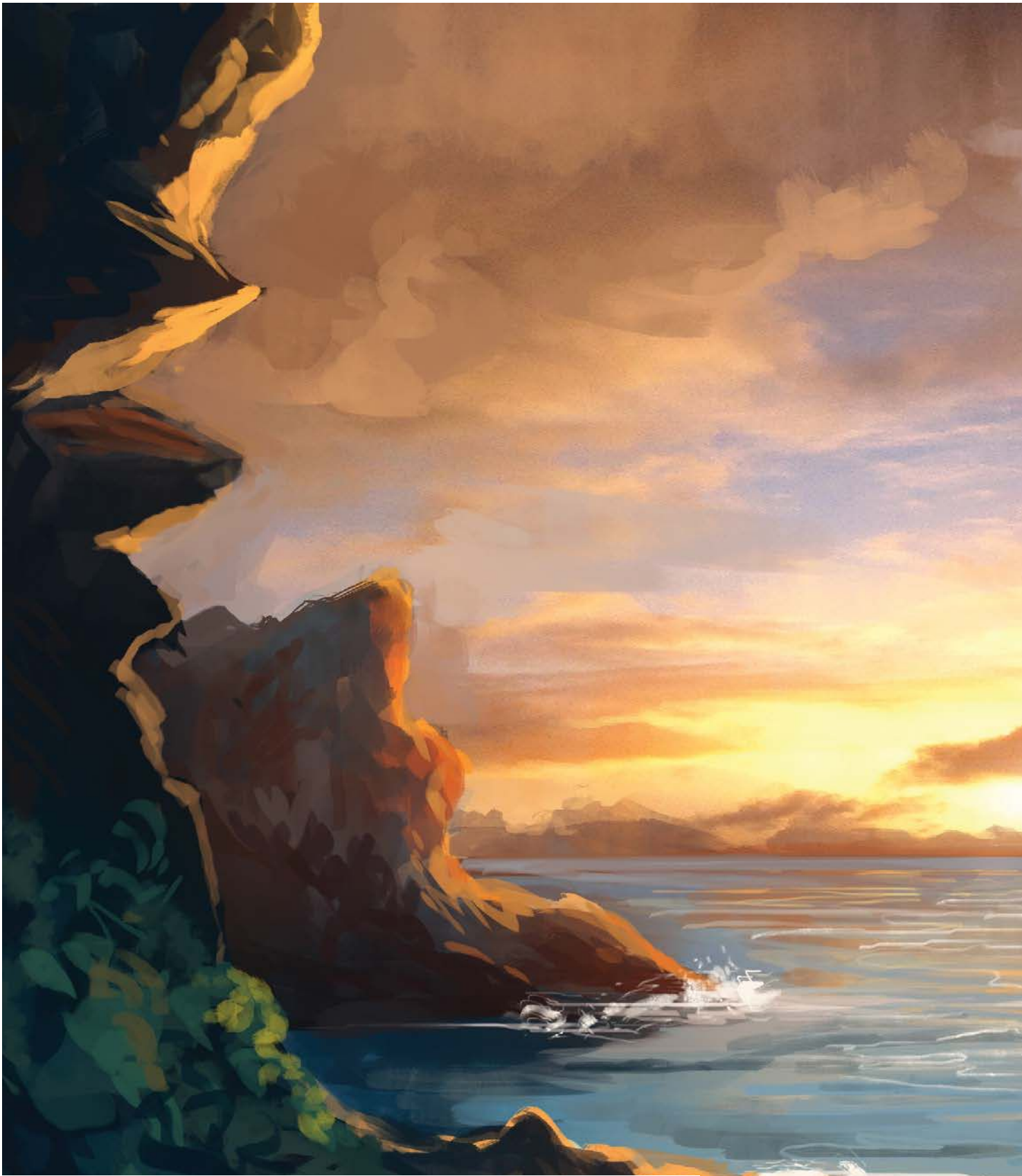
Speed paint a realistic seascape

Katy Grierson shows how to paint a real world seascape at sunset in this free chapter from *Master the Art of Speed Painting* ▶

The Artist

Katy Grierson
kovah.co.uk

Software Used:
Photoshop

Katy Grierson has been
drawing and painting for as
long as she can remember
and feels especially
privileged that it is her job.
She's always had an active
imagination and take greats
pleasure in world building.

FREE CHAPTER

MASTER THE ART OF
Speed Painting
:DIGITAL PAINTING TECHNIQUES

3DTOTALPUBLISHING

Get tips for quickly perfecting light and atmospheric perspective...

Speed paintings can have a particular aesthetic about them, often relying on the use of photos to produce a finished image in a short space of time. While this is incredibly useful in some industries and for just getting an idea down, reliance on photos can be an issue and, for certain projects that require a more painterly aesthetic, can even be a hindrance.
It is always a good idea to practice merely painting without photos to cover any problem areas. In the following tutorial minimal photo use is the goal while still coming out with a pleasing speed painting.

01 **Thumbnails and starting your piece:**
It is always a good idea to work out ideas by beginning with a few thumbnails (see image 01a). To help focus on the shapes, color palette, and atmosphere of your work keep in mind your theme – in this case a seascape. As well as working out composition, thumbnails allow ideas to flow better and can be used to warm up before moving on to the main painting.
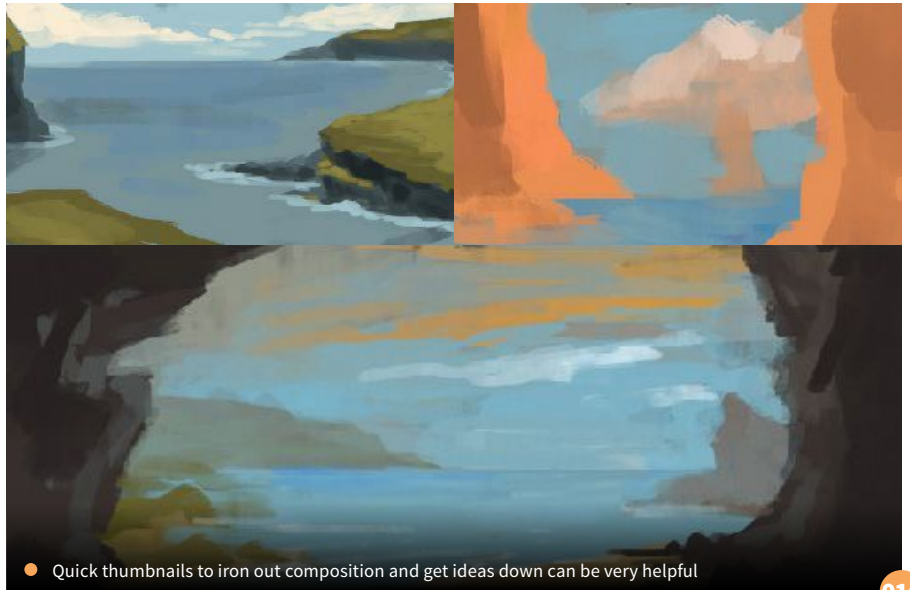
Quick thumbnails to iron out composition and get ideas down can be very helpful

Start big; you can always resize later

Make sure you pick the correct source material for your intentions

● Partially paint over the sunset

02b

With your thumbnails done you can pick the one which speaks to you the most. I choose the one shown in image 01b to be the base thumbnail because the cliffs framing the image have the most interest and potential.

Resize the image to about 6000 × 2400 pixels at 300 dpi; this should be an ample size, especially if you decide to take the painting to a finished illustration. I think that if your machine can handle it, you should always try to work big as it is much easier to shrink an image than to make it bigger!
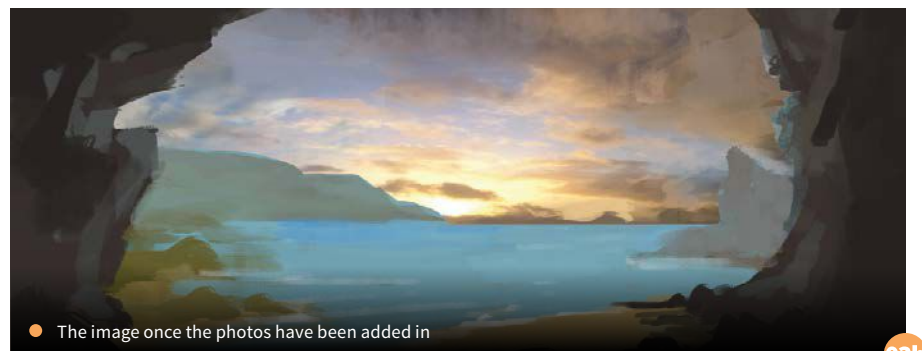
02 **Add the photos:** To introduce more color you can use reference photos which can be found with a quick online search or by taking your own. If you look at image 02a there are two photos I have taken on a smartphone. These will be mostly painted over so the resolution isn't important. If the intention is to leave the photos intact then the source material would need to be of a high resolution.

Paste the reference photos in a separate layer on top of your base image. You may need to edit the images to fit your idea. I stretch the sunset photo and partially paint over it to edit out the street lights and other erroneous material (see image 02b).

03 **Fit the photos in:** After erasing some of the smaller cloud image so that it fits in, turn off the photo layers and go back to the thumbnail image. Select the sky area that will be replaced with the photo using the Magic Wand or Selection tool. This does not have to be too neat at this stage as it will be painted over later. Once this selection is made, create a layer mask. This will mask out anything not in the selection.

● Use the digital masking tools to edit the photo layers

03a

● The image once the photos have been added in

03b

● Masking tools allow flexibility in deciding on the best use for the photo layer
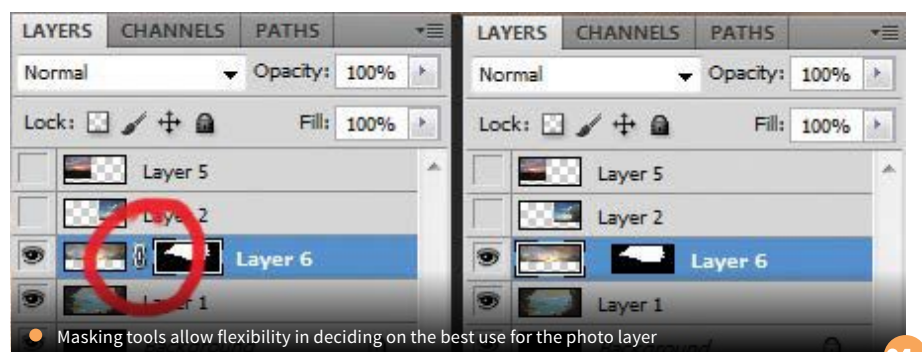
04a

04 **Use layer masks:** Layer masks are incredibly useful as they enable quick editing of layers without destroying what is in the layer itself. Both mask and layer can be edited independently by simply clicking on either one in the Layers panel. In this instance however we need to move the photo but not the mask to make full use of that sunset. Click the link between the photo and mask in the Layers panel (image 04a). This unlinks them and allows us to move the photo slightly to the right. If we had simply deleted what was not in the selection before, this would not have been possible (image 04b). ▶

The image once the photo has been moved

04b

05 **Integrate the photo:** Duplicate the photo layer, complete with mask. No longer needing the mask it is simply a case of dragging the mask itself to the trash bin on the Layers panel. This will bring a pop-up that asks if you want to keep and apply the mask or delete it. In this case we can delete it as it is no longer needed for this layer. Applying the mask will remove the editing capabilities that the mask allows and simply delete the non-visible aspects. Mirror the photo layer, turn down the opacity, and place over the water and erase as needed.

06 **Back to painting:** Once the photo is in place we can begin painting. Start a new layer and, using a large textured brush, start re-adding elements to the piece. Color picking from the photo can help a great
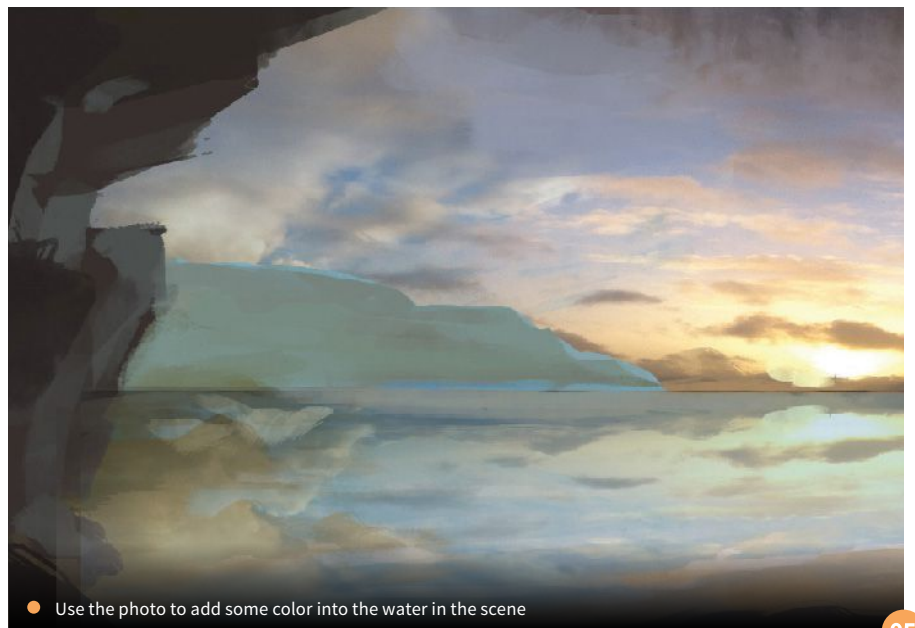
Use the photo to add some color into the water in the scene

05

Color pick from the photo to tie the image together

06

deal as it begins to tie the photo and painting together. Keep in mind where the light will be coming from based on the photo that is being used. This will greatly influence the colors of your scene based on the time of day and the local color and texture of the surfaces.

07 **Paint atmospheric perspective:** This scene deals with a large distance going into the canvas. One of the easiest ways to add depth is to remember that for things further away there is more atmosphere between us and the object. This means that it will almost always need to be desaturated, slightly blue, and have less detail compared to the foreground. Keep this in mind when choosing color and tone in the scene.

> "Steer clear of using blacks and grays as they wash out the image"

08 **Add some lighting:** The lighting in your scene can easily add interest to your piece; it would be easy in this instance to simply make the foreground rocks dark and in shadow. By adding the highlights at the top of the cliffs in the foreground, however, we stop the eye disregarding the rocky frame completely. Now is a good time to add some shadow as well. Steer clear of using blacks and grays as they wash out the image. Darkening and adding saturation, especially in cooler colors, can really add depth without losing detail.

09 **Even out the color:** Once the main color and lighting scheme has been decided there will undoubtedly still be some ▶
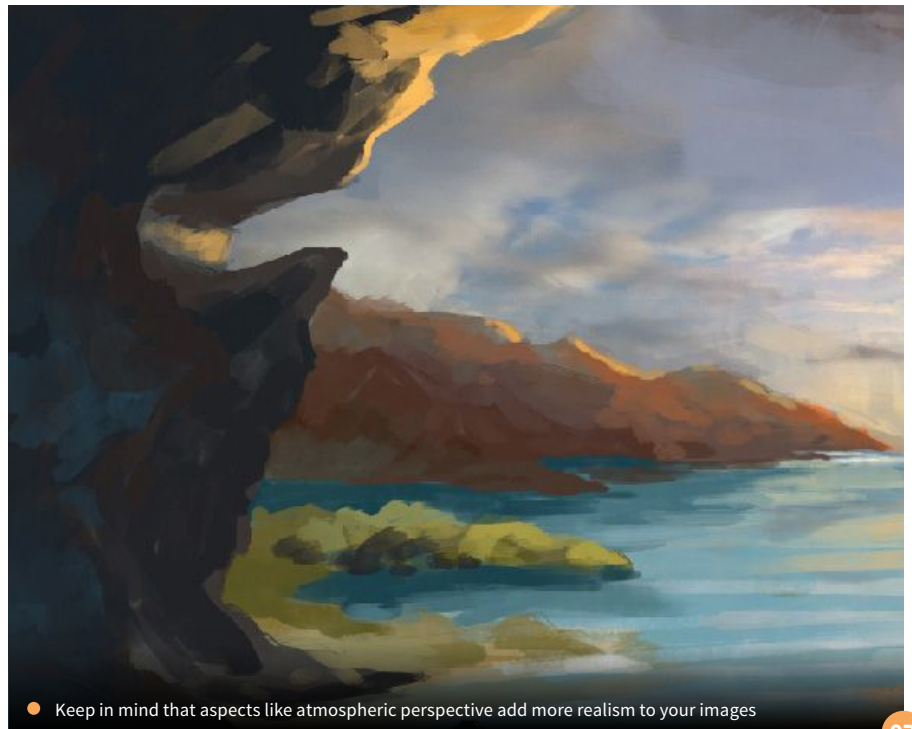
Keep in mind that aspects like atmospheric perspective add more realism to your images
07
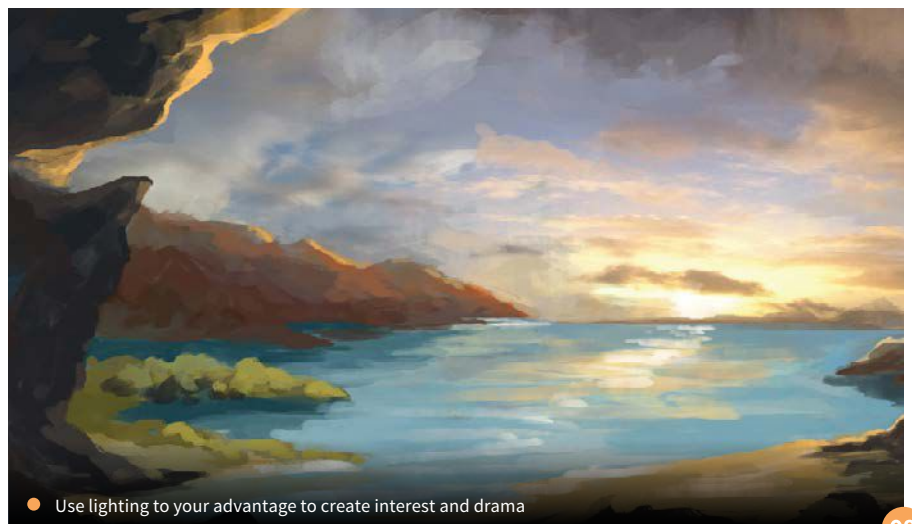
Use lighting to your advantage to create interest and drama
08
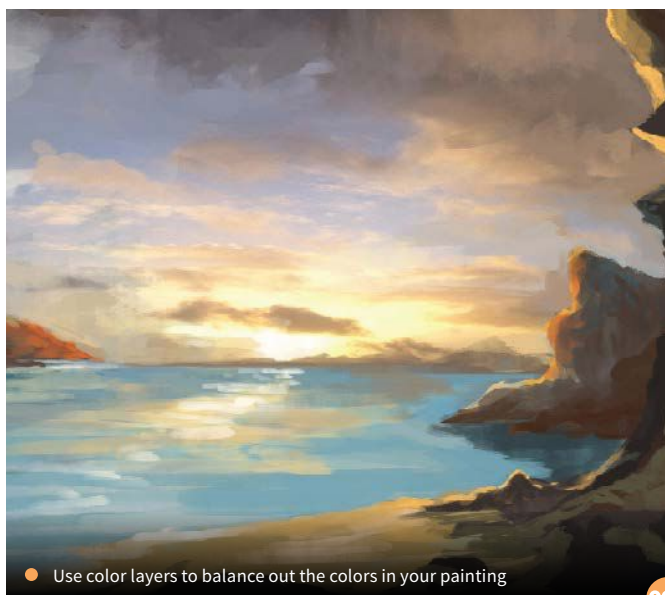
Use color layers to balance out the colors in your painting
09a
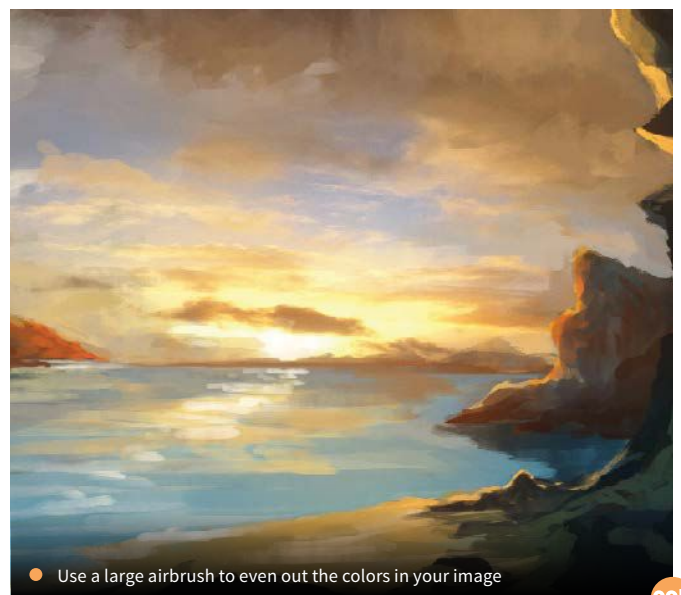
Use a large airbrush to even out the colors in your image
09b

Learn to use single brushstrokes rather than repeated ones to denote color and tone
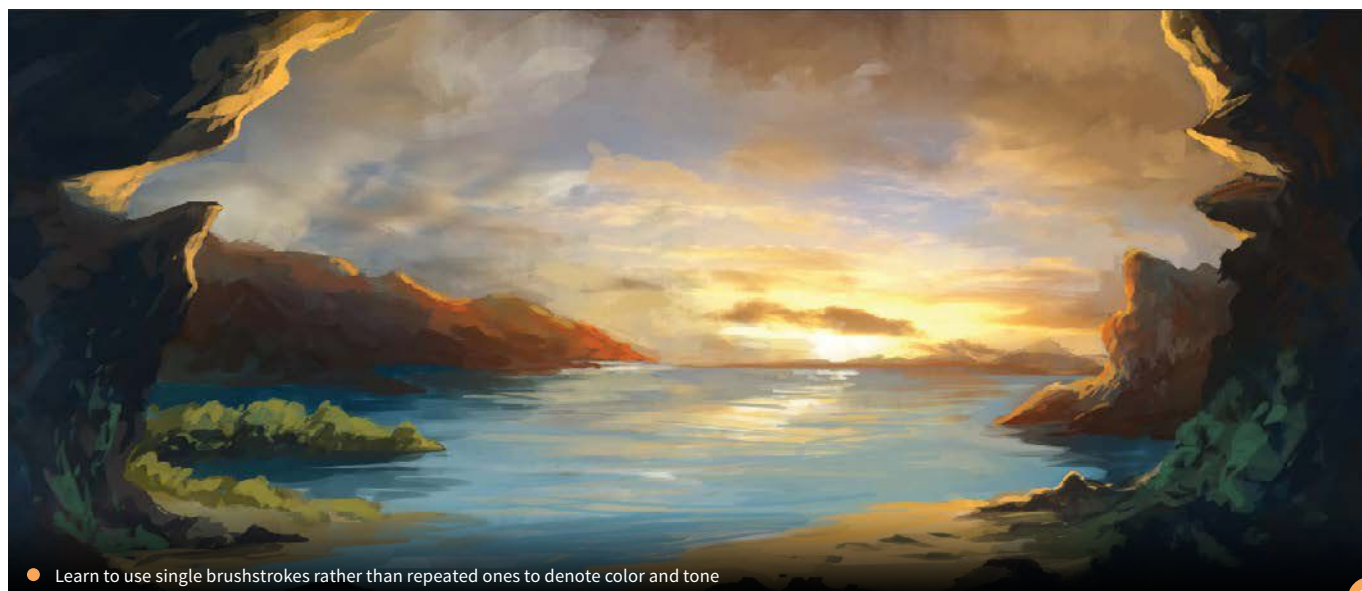
10

areas that are looking drab and lackluster. Making use of color layers provides a quick and simple solution. Here a Soft Light layer is used to just tint the color (image 09a); it is akin to a wash color on an oil painting. A large soft airbrush often works best for this as hard edges can leave artifacts that look distracting when the layers are flattened later (image 09b).

10 Detail the image: Once the colors have been adjusted, we can begin adding more detail. Switching to a harder brush at this juncture will provide some harder edges and therefore much more detail and contrast, especially in the foreground on the rocks and cave entrance.

Add white edges to the water to imply waves

11

Use the editing tools to make the most of the image
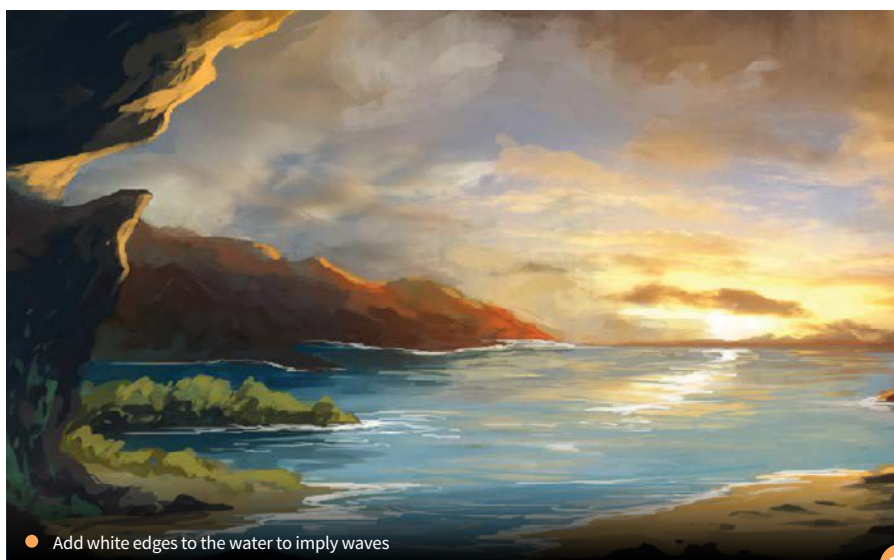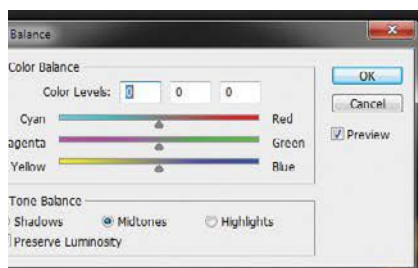
12a

Adding contrasting but subtle greens also creates interest in the rocks. Using a hard brush prevents over-rendering which can eat up time during speed painting. A single brushstroke denoting color and tone is much faster than fussy repeated strokes with a lighter, softer brush.

11 Create the water: Water can be tricky to paint quickly; doing studies of different water conditions can be highly useful as well as informative as there are so many variables to consider – lighting, water type, environmental factors like wind or gravity, local color of the water, and how clear it is to name but a few. In this instance the water is a calm but moving coastal body of water so simply adding white edges to the blue of the water instantly gives the impression of waves lapping gently up the shore.

> **"Flipping the image horizontally is one of the quickest ways to see if the composition is working"**

12 Check it is working: Flipping the image horizontally is one of the quickest ways to see if the composition is working; doing this at all stages can really help show any issues. At this point it is also a good juncture to use the software's tools to once again tweak the overall mood of the image.

I use Color Balance which is available in Photoshop through Image > Adjustments > Color Balance (image 12a). Here the blues and pinky oranges are pronounced to really make the most of that sunset sky (image 12b).

13 Finishing touches: The speed painting is mostly complete now and time is running short for the two-hour goal. There could easily be several more hours spent on rendering the rocks in the foreground but at this stage it is about priorities. Therefore I decide to spend more time on the water as it is a seascape. Adding little wave splashes with a splatter-type brush and more highlights on the water itself really adds a sense of that moving, ever-changing water. A little more detail and color variation on the foliage also just adds that little something extra.

Use color to make the most of the sunset

12b

Choose what is important in your image to add some final finishing touches
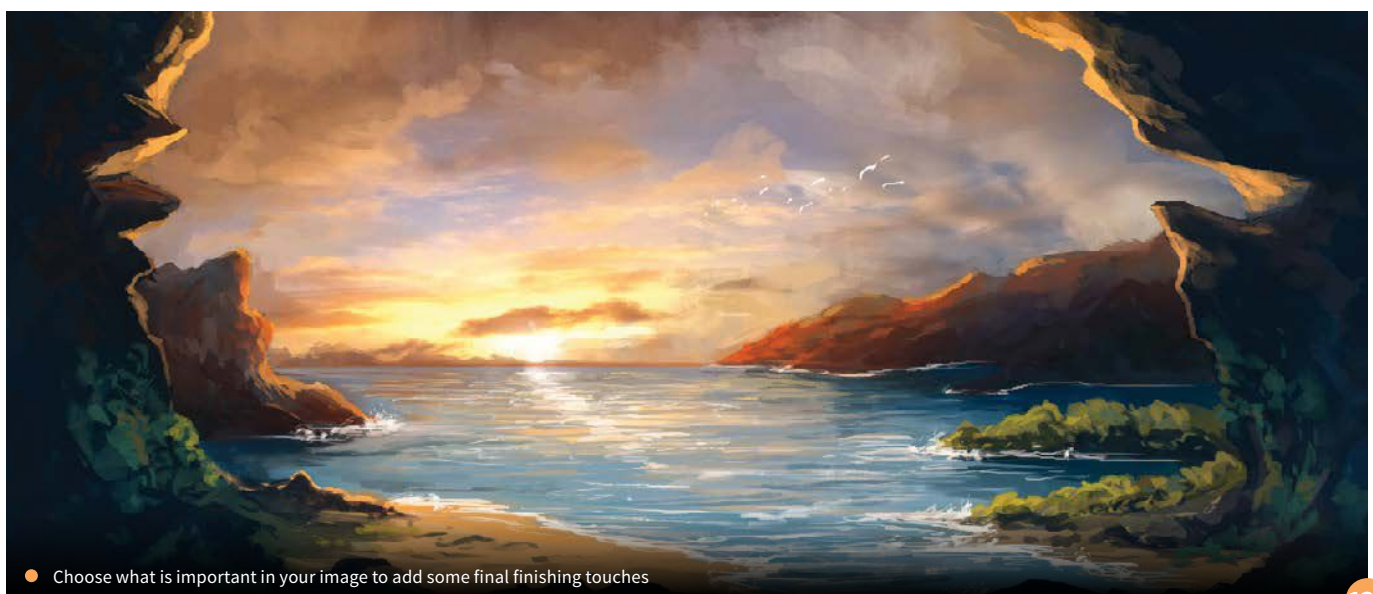
13a

The Artist

Katy Grierson
kovah.co.uk
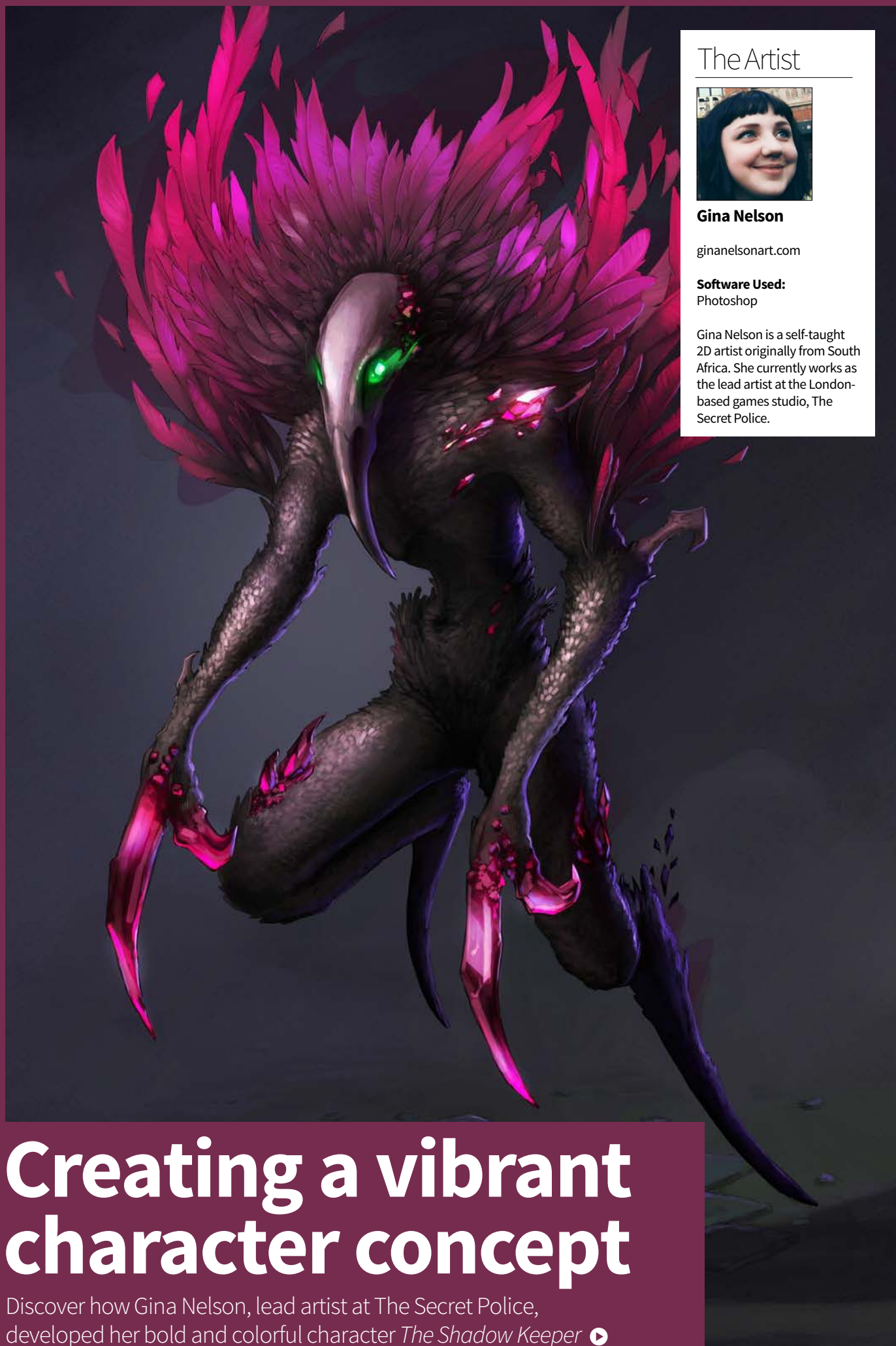
The Artist

Gina Nelson

ginanelsonart.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Gina Nelson is a self-taught 2D artist originally from South Africa. She currently works as the lead artist at the London-based games studio, The Secret Police.

Creating a vibrant character concept

Discover how Gina Nelson, lead artist at The Secret Police, developed her bold and colorful character *The Shadow Keeper* ▶

All images © Gina Nelson

See how you can keep your process quick and neat with clipping masks...

In this article I will talk about a process I've used for creating characters involving line-work techniques and masking in Photoshop. I approach most of my projects very differently from one another depending on what I'm trying to achieve, but I have found that the process described here is very neat, efficient and saves time. I started with a detailed plan of the entire character using line-work, followed by coloring and lighting using masking and clipping masks, and finally onto blend modes and layer adjustments.

The way I work should by no means be used as an exhaustive formula for creating characters – there are so many ways to go about it – but the techniques I describe here are very useful if you are trying to get work finished quickly without having to spend a lot of time cleaning up your files afterwards. This is very useful when you are creating work professionally for clients or for your studio. I hope you will enjoy seeing my workflow on this piece!

01 **Concepts first:** As this was the first part of the process, it was really important to get the basic idea of what I wanted to draw out of my head and onto the canvas. Sometimes I do a few smaller thumbnail drawings before I am happy with an idea, and then follow it with a rough concept.

I found that working with the canvas zoomed out helped me to stay focused on the overall idea, instead of getting caught up in the details that I really didn't want to be thinking about then. In this step I wanted to focus on things like design, silhouette, personality and atmosphere. If those things had not come across in a zoomed out rough concept, then I would probably have struggled to get them into the final piece. I got the basics right from the start, and then tried a few things; that's what concept creation is all about.

02 **Planning with line-work:** Once I was happy with the concept that I had completed, I dropped the opacity of that layer down to around 30-40%. This made it easy to use the concept as a guide while I planned out the entire piece using line-work. The line-work ▶

● Concepts were kept loose and rough as this was the time to explore ideas

01

● The concept was used on a low opacity as a guide for the final image

02

didn't need to be perfect because I would end up painting over a lot of it anyway.

Being able to create neat line-work is always going to be a useful skill, however. If you struggle with your lines and are determined to get really neat line-work into your drawing, Lazy Nezumi is a great Photoshop plugin that can help you smooth out lines.

Once I had finished the line-work I applied a filter (Filter > Other > Maximum). Doing this expanded the negative space in my drawing and as a result thinned out the lines. This filter also kept the thickness where the lines joined, which gave them a more organic look.

03 **Masking out:** Once I had all the details I wanted in the image planned out, I created a mask. Using a mask helped to make my initial lighting and coloring nice and easy. This basically just meant that I was coloring everything that was behind the lines on a new layer. It was easiest to do this using the Lasso tool and a standard round brush with the Opacity Jitter turned off.

I made sure that I kept the mask as neat as possible and that the mask was filled with the Opacity set to 100%. If any part of it was not at 100% I could have run into some problems, as applying any color or gradient over the mask would only apply to whatever the mask's opacity was set to.

04 **Using clipping masks:** Now that the lines and masking in were done, I started to block in my colors and basic lighting using a new layer that had been set as a clipping mask onto the mask layer. The mask I had created defined the visible boundaries for any clipping masks I applied to it. Remember, you can have multiple clipping masks applied to the same layer.

To create a clipping mask I had to make a new layer which sat directly above the mask layer in the Layers tab. Then I simply held down the Alt key and allowed my cursor to hover directly between the mask layer and the new layer. A tiny symbol of an arrow with a square appeared, and then I simply clicked to apply the clipping mask. When I painted on the clipping mask layer it would then only paint within the mask.

● The drawing was masked out with the Lasso tool before the lighting and color were set

03

● Basic colors and lighting were painted onto the mask layer using clipping masks

04

05 **Painting in details:** This is probably the part I spent the longest amount of time on. I also found that it was the easiest part of the entire process. At this point all the difficult stuff was already out of the way. I had done all of the design work, which is essentially the most important part of any painting, and I had painted in the basic colors and lighting. That meant it was time to just sit back, relax, put on some good music and render out all the details. Painting a few things that were outside of the clipping mask softened the silhouette a little bit at this point.

Remember to use references when painting. Most people don't know off the top of their heads what feathers look like or how light moves through crystals, so use the internet; it is your most valuable asset.

06 **Basic background:** On a new layer, I then painted in some very rough colors so that I could start to think about how this character was going to sit in the background. I wanted him to really stand out from the background while still feeling like he was a part of whatever the environment would be. I used a similar color palette to the colors used on

● **Time was spent painting details and enjoying the process!**

05

the character, but all the colors were muted so that they didn't interfere with the character.

Even though this project was focusing on the design and creation of a character, it was important to display the character in some sort of background instead of just on a plain white canvas. Even simple backgrounds make pieces look much more finished and polished, which is great for professional projects.

07 **Environment detailing:** At this point I added in some details into the environment to help tie the character to the background. Everything in the environment could be painted quite softly and roughly because the environment was not at the heart of this picture; it merely provided me with an ambient setting in which to display the character.

You might want to consider using textural brushes for this sort of detail, as they are often much better for blending and creating rough backgrounds than the standard round or square brushes. I painted a shadow on the ground to reinforce where my primary light was coming from, and I also painted in some soft purple light onto the stones as a secondary light source.

08 **Adding rim lights:** In the previous step I added a secondary light source to the ground. In this step I used a rim light on the character. This really helped to make it feel as though the character was part of the atmospheric world I had just painted, because the brightly colored light was appearing on both the character and the floor.
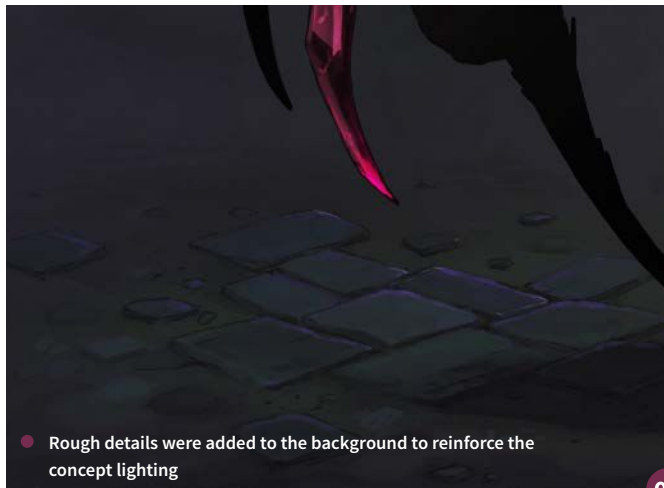
There are many different reasons to use rim lights. Typically you might use them to add a dramatic feeling to paintings, as well as to help the subject matter in darker scenes stand out where they might otherwise fade into the background. However, it is important not to overuse rim lighting as it might make the lighting in your painting seem artificial. Steer clear of using pure whites and try to keep your rim lights dim. The brightest parts of your picture ▶

● **A basic background focusing on color made the piece more polished**

06

Rough details were added to the background to reinforce the concept lighting

07

Rim lighting tied the character to the background while also making him stand out

08

are likely to be what catches the eye first, and you don't want that to be the rim light.

09 **Making it vibrant:** At this point I felt that the painting was still looking a little dull. I had started off with a very dark picture and added in a dark background. The character was standing out because of the purple rim lights but it was not enough, and I really needed to make him pop more.

Making use of the mask again, I started to play around with layer blending modes. Painting with a soft white brush on an Overlay layer made it easy to add more dramatic lighting and vibrancy to the painting. I also decided to draw the viewer's eye to my character's face first by making his eyes bright green so that they really contrasted with the pink and purple palette of the rest of the image.

10 **Final adjustments:** Using blending modes is fun but they can often affect the lightest and darkest parts of an image which results in an unnatural feel. In the final stage of this process, I wanted to lighten the darkest blacks a tiny bit and darken the brightest whites. I did this by playing around with the Levels adjustment panel to knock the levels back down to a point where I felt that the character fitted into the environment nicely.

The easiest way to access the Levels adjustment panel is by hitting Ctrl+L on your keyboard or by adding a Level adjustment layer (the circle icon at the bottom of the Layers tab) which can conveniently also be set as a clipping mask, affecting your character but not the background. Once I was happy with the levels, that was pretty much it! ●
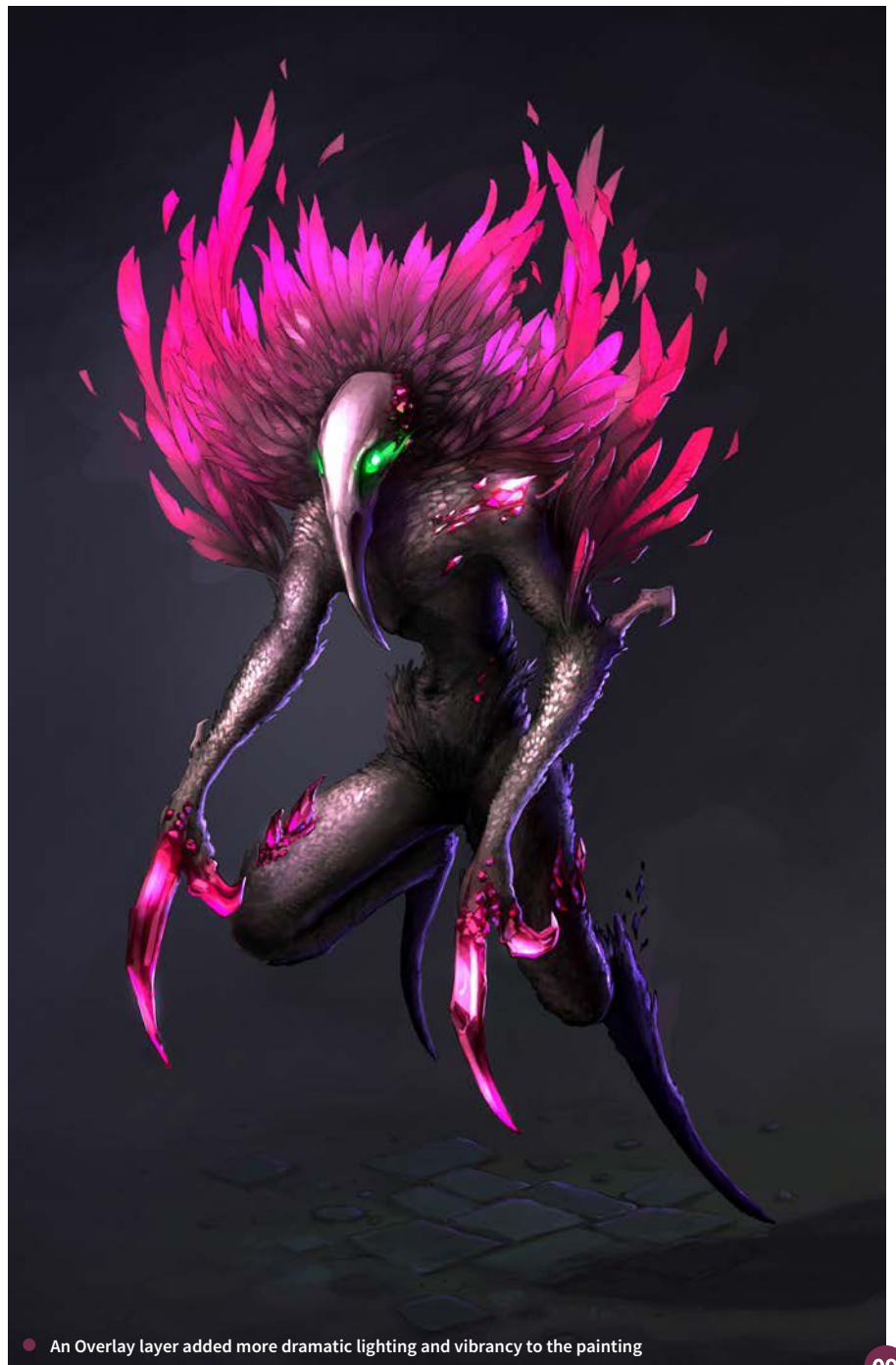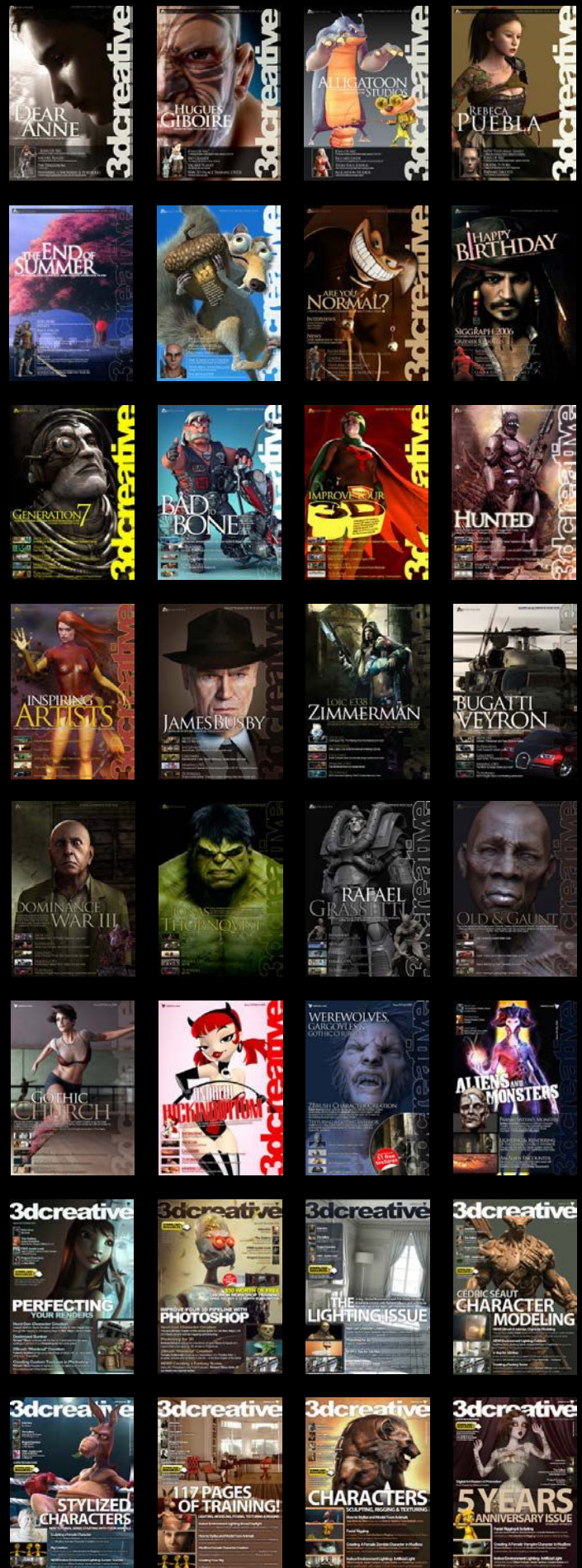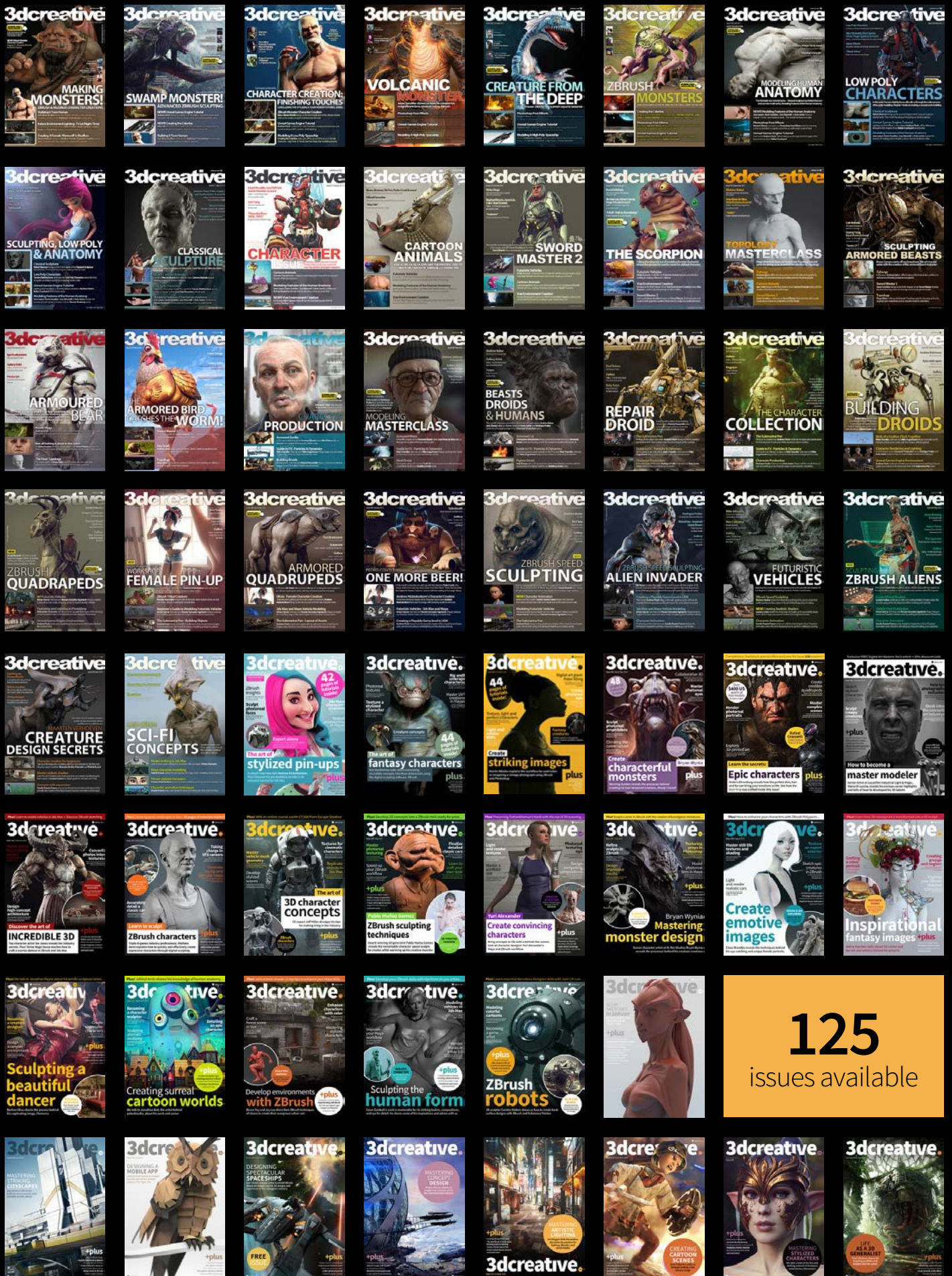

An Overlay layer added more dramatic lighting and vibrancy to the painting

09

DIGITAL ART MASTER:

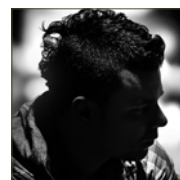# The Fall

by Juan Pablo Roldán

Discover how concept artist Juan Pablo Roldán developed a new process of bringing ideas to life by playing with texture and shape ▶

All images © Roldán

The Artist

Juan Pablo Roldán
artstation.com/artist/roldan

Software Used:
Photoshop

Juan Pablo Roldán is a freelance concept artist based in Medellin, Colombia. He creates deeply atmospheric scenes and environments for film and game projects including the upcoming *Halo Wars 2*.

This concept was inspired by the Biblical story of the Ark, but I wanted to set it in the context of a dystopian future full of giant ships, showing the Ark falling in the middle of a city in war.

Before the beginning of any concept, I try to imagine and feel the world that I am going to create. I think about the time in which it will take place, who the characters are, and what kind of atmosphere I want to convey. Additionally, I always dig into history to create a believable context.

Starting to paint

I have fun exploring different brushstrokes, textures and shapes. I like to blend them, generate chaos, and then control all the mess to fit the direction that I have already chosen. I used this method to begin with, generating unexpected and interesting shapes that I could use to enhance and guide the idea. I always keep in mind that among this chaos I can extract what I want to see. I tried to be consistent with the main idea and not get distracted by others. I then used some brushes that simulated cloud shapes and mixed it with


● Defining the background and focal point, as well as the silhouette and perspective of the ship

> **"It was important to define the vanishing points of the ship in order to locate the elements accurately and proportionally"**

some textures. To establish the background, I found a strong silhouette in the midst of the chaos and used it to establish the volume, shape and the perspective of what was going to be the main feature of the scene: the ship.

Next, I sought out some reference images from www.textures.com. It is important to work using a lot of visual references, especially when working on complex designs such as vehicles or robots.
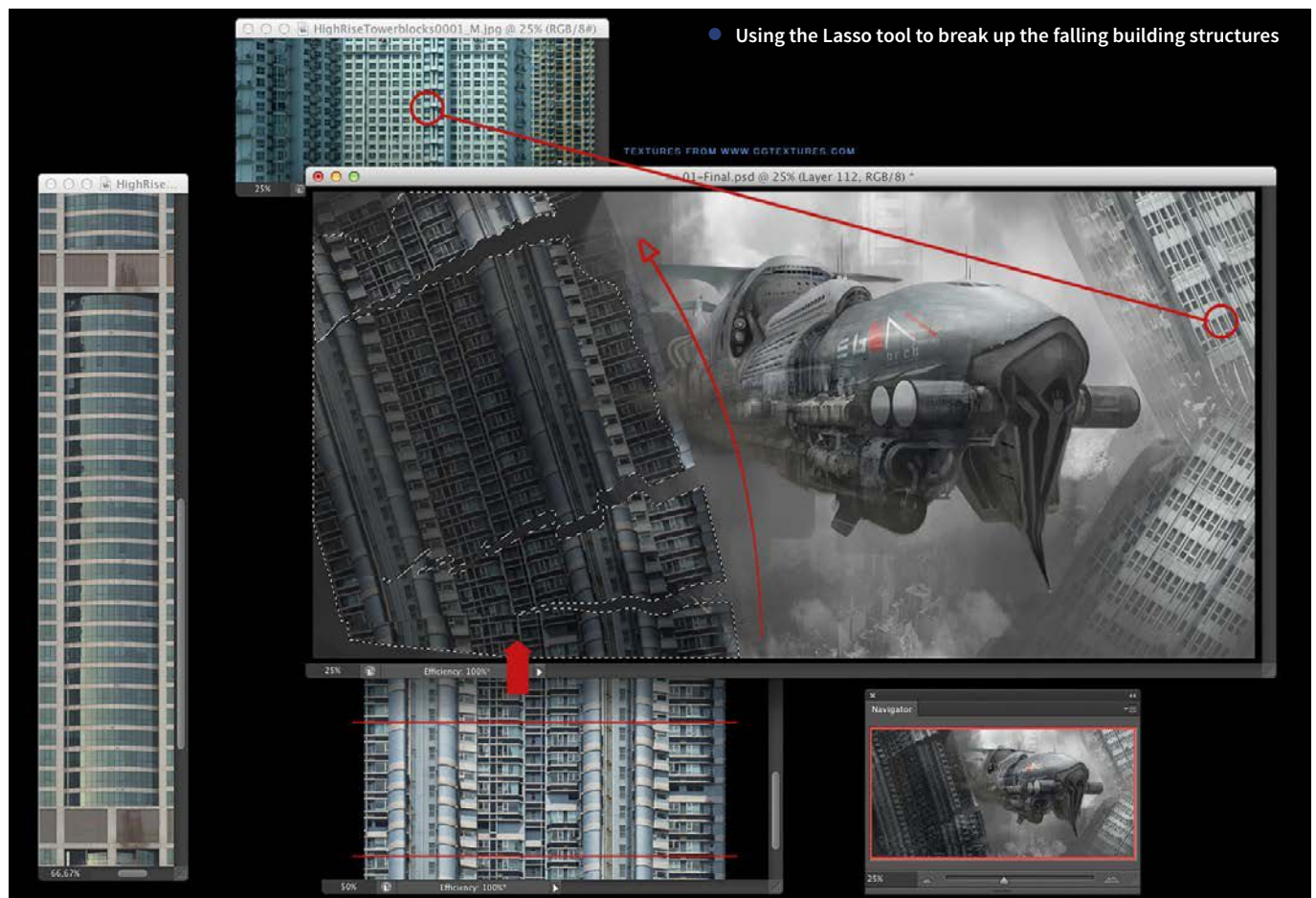

● At this point, I brought in references and established the vanishing points
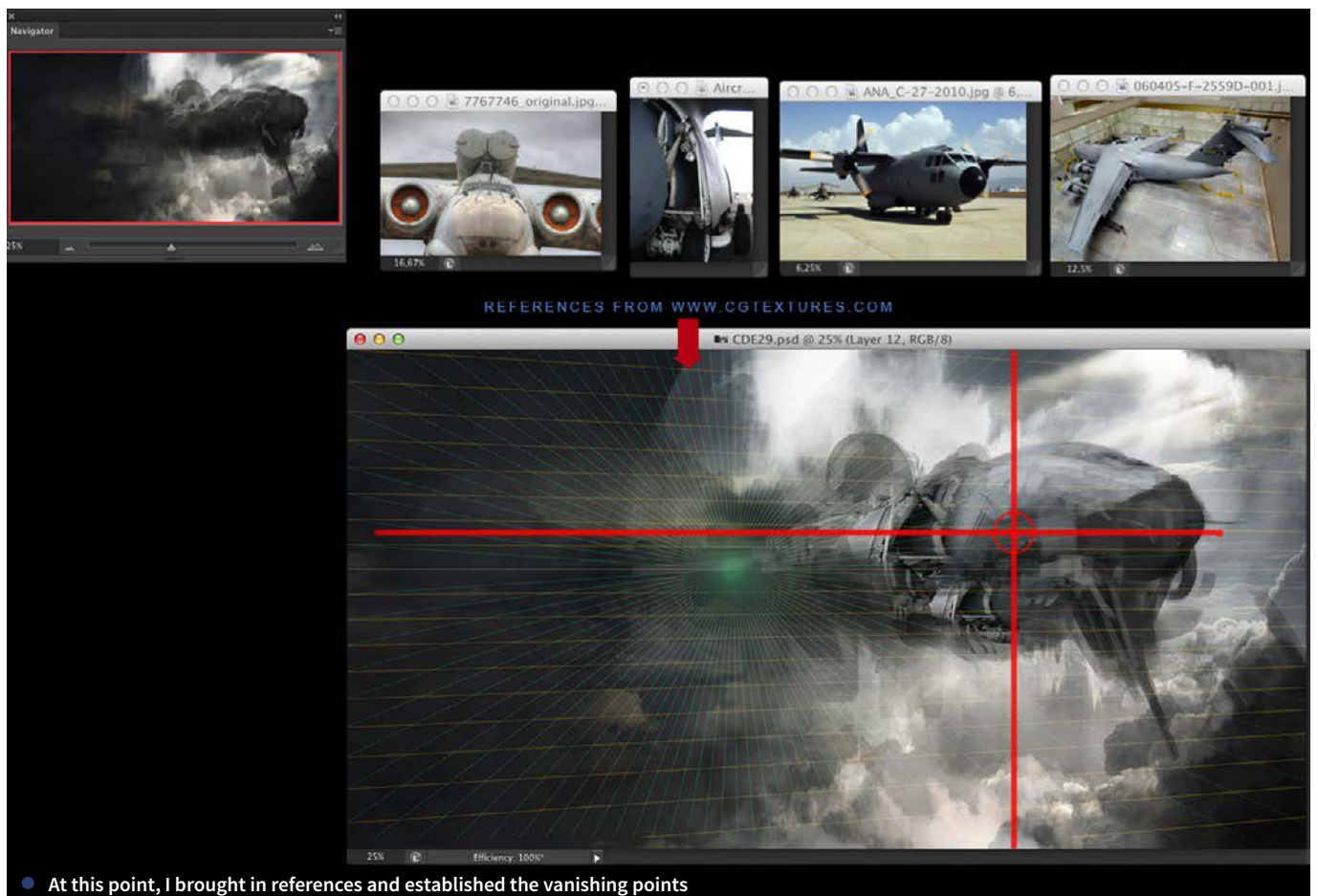
Textures from www.textures.com

● Adding detail to the focal point by extracting elements of different reference images

● Using the Lasso tool to break up the falling building structures

Usually before I start any design, I have already created a moodboard with all the visual information that I need for my concept.

Those references allowed me to understand the structure and design elements of the subject, helping me to create a credible

"At this stage it was also important to adjust the light, values and color that I had set previously"

construction for the ship. If I placed engines or turbines close to the cabin, for example, it would make the ship design seem unrealistic.

In addition, it was important to define the vanishing points of the ship in order to locate the elements accurately and proportionally.

Reference extraction

Next, I added more detail to the front part of the ship, which was the focal point of the image. ▶
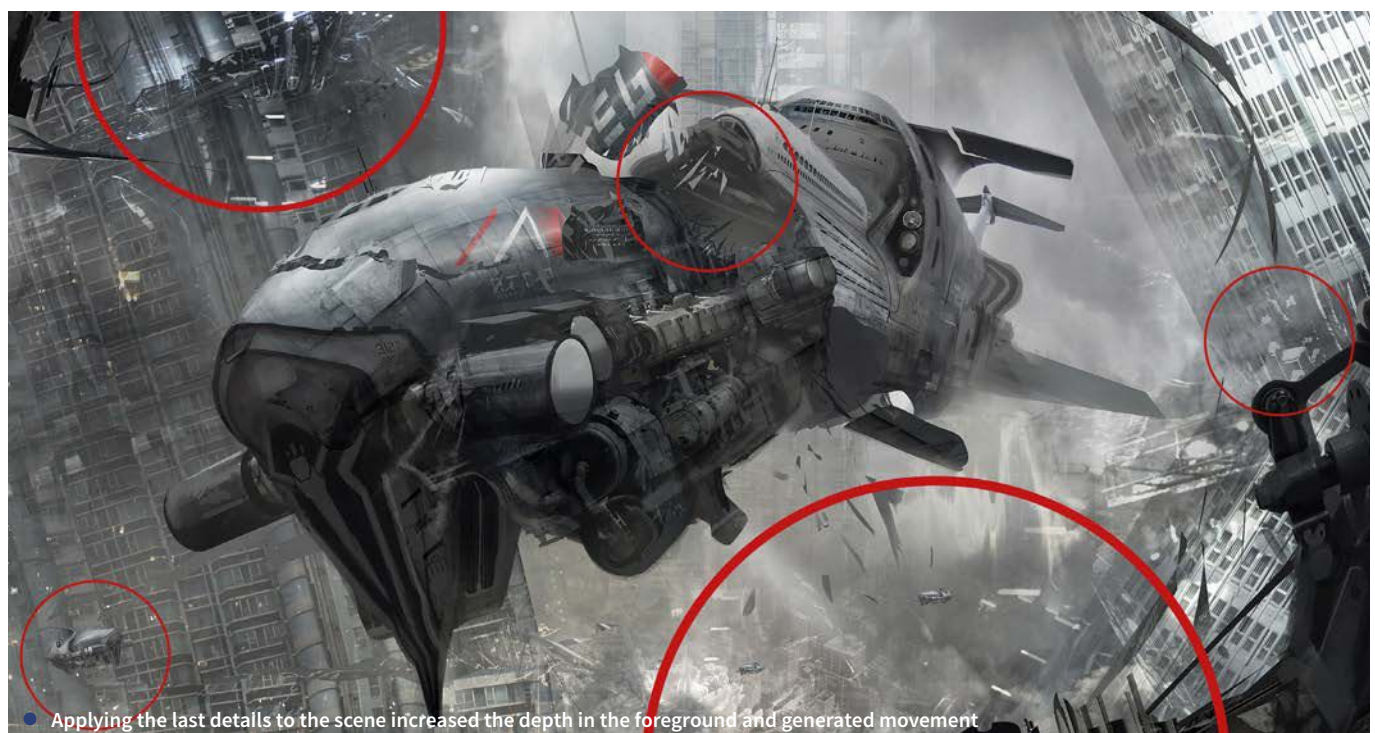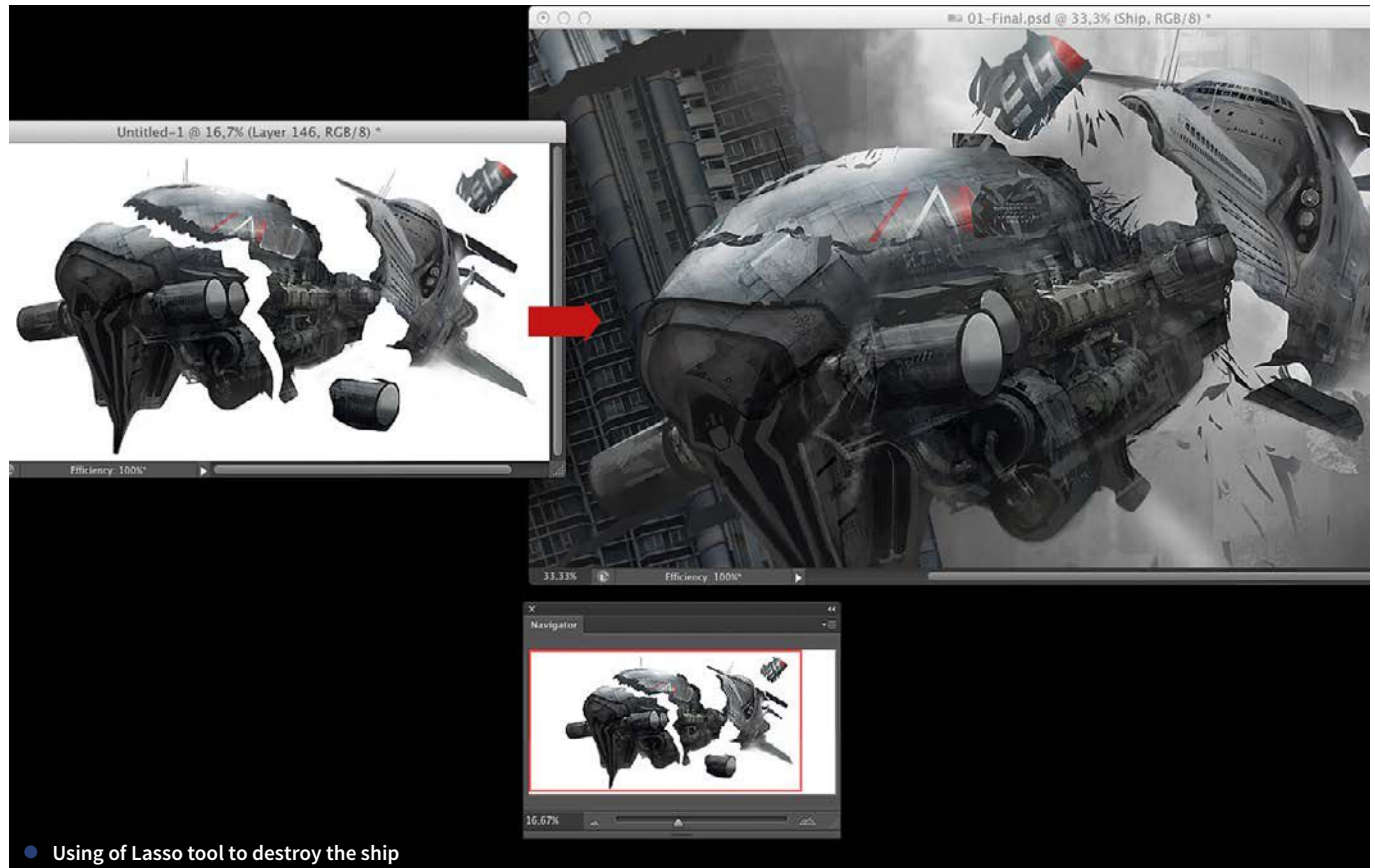
I needed to find the balance by including detail but avoiding exaggeration. At this stage it was also important to adjust the light, values and color that I had set previously. During the extraction of these key elements, I carefully chose the parts of the reference images that could work. I added the ship's enormous engine and some little cabins and windows to create contrast and scale, giving the impression that it was a huge vehicle.
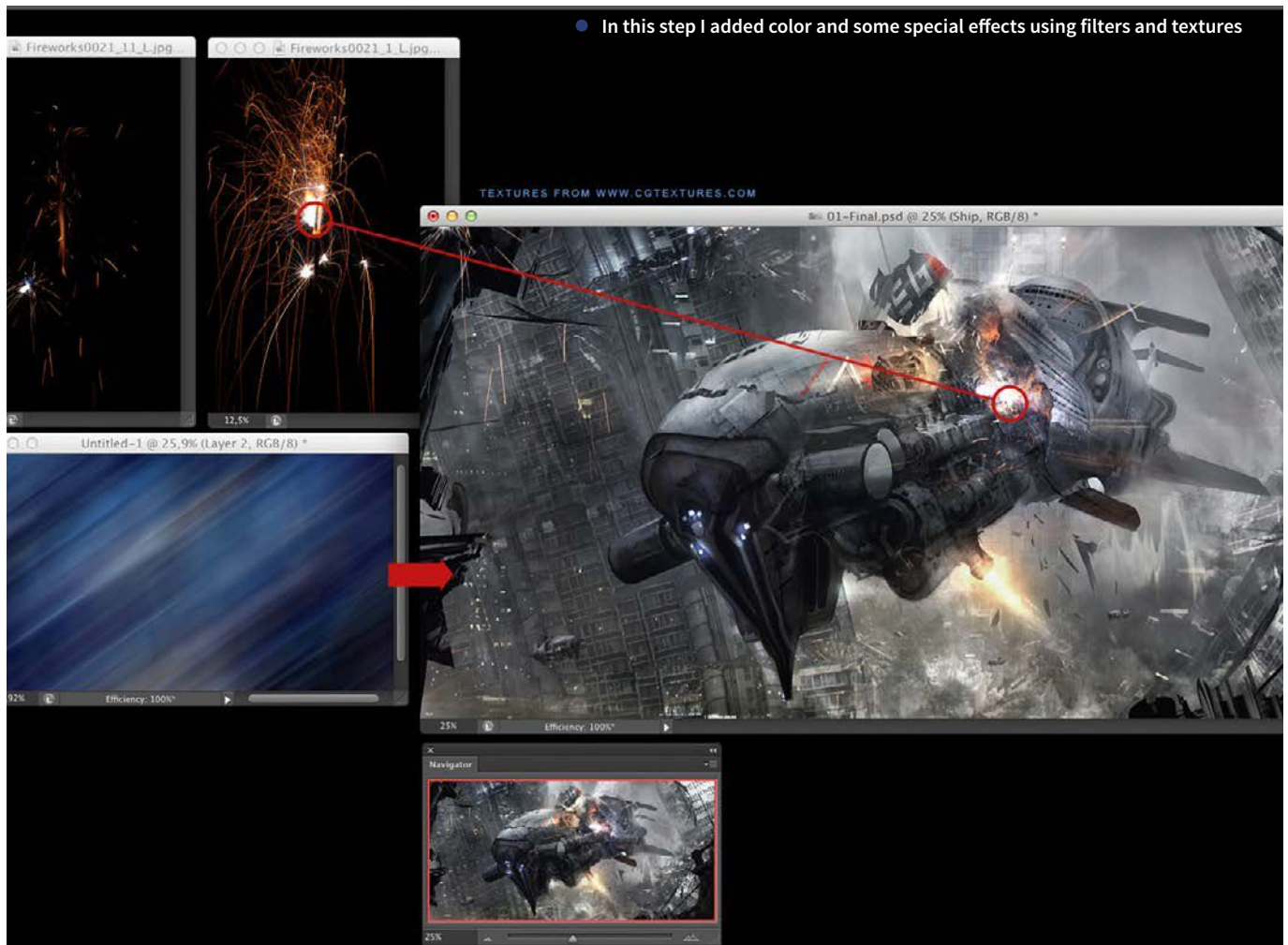
Environment

Once I had a clearer idea of the ship, it was time to deal with the design of the environment and the placement of the ship.

First of all, I generated some blocks near the ship, which would be the buildings that would be falling down. After defining their shapes and directions, I carefully looked for some textures that could add realism to the structures. I adapted these textures to the shapes I had already created and then I broke

● **Using of Lasso tool to destroy the ship**

● **Applying the last details to the scene increased the depth in the foreground and generated movement**

● In this step I added color and some special effects using filters and textures

them up – literally! To do this, I used the Lasso Tool to convey the feeling that the building structures were collapsing. Next, I applied the same effect to the ship, which I had already defined. Using the

> **"In this case I combined blue and red values to generate vibration. Using the motion blur effect I blended those values and achieved a direction for the light in the scene"**

Lasso Tool, I broke down the fuselage of the vehicle, trying to represent that an explosion had occurred within the ship

Details, colors and effects
For the next step, I added some elements and particles on different planes to enhance the image. In the foreground, I added some pieces to generate the impression of depth. In addition to this, I set some little spare parts in the background and around the ship as debris.

These elements created the impression that parts of the vehicle were being ejected by the explosion. This effect also added more movement to the scene.

It was then time to add more color to the image, so I first defined some colors on a new canvas. In this case I combined blue and red values to generate vibration. Using the motion blur effect, I blended those values and achieved a direction for the light in the scene.

I then applied this new image above the one and started to experiment with different blending modes, such as Overlay, Soft Light, Screen and Lighten, until I found one that created the effect I was looking for. Next I needed to incorporate images of sparks with some parts of the ship to show the breaking electrical cables and reinforce the dynamism and realism. To do this, I used Screen blending mode.

Finally, I blurred some regions of the image to achieve a depth-of-field effect, and I also used the Sharpen Tool on the ship to increase detail, too.

Finally my concept was finished. While developing this scene I learned several new ways to generate ideas through playing with textures and shapes. This new process allowed me to bring scenes to life that I had been thinking about for some time, giving them the dynamism and realism that I was always hoping for.

Creating new worlds
The techniques explained are also useful when creating different types of images; for example taking my own ideas to work for a videogame or movie brief. Never forget the importance of the experimentation: it's a powerful tool to generate new ideas and achieve astonishing images! ●

The Artist
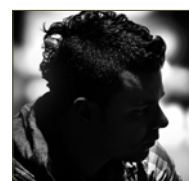
Juan Pablo Roldán
artstation.com/artist/roldan

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